

Public Perceptions of the Police Complaints System

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Summary

This research aims to explore and articulate the views of certain key groups about their willingness to make complaints about police conduct¹, their awareness and perception of the IPCC, and their overall confidence in the complaints system. The research also provides a number of policy recommendations for encouraging members of the public to complain when appropriate.

The core programme of research consisted of 20 discussion groups, made up of members of the public identified in quantitative research as less willing to lodge a complaint and/or more sceptical of the complaints system. These groups included a variety of ethnic minority participants, alongside general public discussion groups, and included participants from rural and urban areas, of different ages and social classes, of different language abilities, and with varying levels of contact with the police.

This report is divided up into four key sections, outlined below:

Typology of participants

Perceptions of the police heavily influenced perceptions of the complaints procedure in general, and the likelihood of making a complaint in particular.

The majority of the participants can be split, along a continuum, into three groups:

- **‘Pro-police’** group, who tended to be the most positive in their assessment of the police service, seeing them as a positive force in society.
- **‘Passive Sceptics’** (the largest group) who were broadly in favour of the police as a force for stability and the maintenance of law and order – but who also had a number of criticisms of the manner in which the police operated.
- **‘Highly Disengaged’** participants, however, tended to often be young, ethnic minority participants, who felt their relationship with the police was almost exclusively antagonistic.

¹ The Police Reform Act 2002 gave complainants the right to complain about the conduct of all police personnel rather than just police officers. When referring to the police in this report this includes all police personnel.

Perceptions of the police

Initial perceptions of the police varied significantly amongst participants, from the sympathetic to the explicitly hostile. These perceptions also have a strong impact on perceptions of the complaints process itself.

- **‘Pro-police’** participants tended to be older, White and middle class, and tended to have the most positive perceptions of the police and, by extension, the complaints process.
- **‘Passive Sceptics’**, by contrast, tended to have had only limited contact with the police, and as such their perceptions both of individual officers, and of the complaints procedure, were somewhat unfocussed and unclear.
- **‘Highly Disengaged’** participants, however, tended to often be young, Black or minority ethnic participants living in inner cities. This group had the lowest level of trust in the police, and had often experienced negative contact with officers. This group also tended to have the lowest level of faith in ‘any police complaints’ procedure.

Barriers to complaining

The decision about whether to make a complaint about the behaviour of the police was based on a variety of external cultural and social factors, such as pre-existing perceptions of the police, perceptions of what constituted acceptable police conduct, and prior ideas about making a complaint. The decision to complain was not simply predicated upon the behaviour of a given officer/police staff member at a given time.

Overall, the research identified a number of barriers to making a complaint:

- **Cultural constructs of acceptable police behaviour** heavily impacted on the propensity to complain about specific types of behaviour. There was no universally accepted definition of what does and does not represent acceptable police behaviour, meaning that different types of participants would be likely to complain about different types of behaviour. For example, ‘Pro-police’ participants tended to express a willingness to make a complaint about a wide variety of things, whilst many

'Highly Disengaged' participants tended to avoid contact with the police in all but the most extreme cases.

- **Barriers related to police reactions** were focussed around cultural or social barriers to making a complaint. Typical examples of this type of barrier included the fear that the police might label you a 'troublemaker', or that they would all stick together once a complaint had been made. These barriers also included cultural reasons for making a complaint, and included certain ethnic minorities, who cited cultural disincentives to lodging an appropriate complaint, because they were concerned about the way in which the police might react to them because of their ethnicity and the way in which their community would react to them for making a complaint.
- **Process-related barriers** were focussed around perceptions of the bureaucracy or hassle involved in complaining. The fear that complaining involved filling in a lot of forms, or that an acceptable outcome would take a long time were typical process-related barriers. Whilst these barriers were typically not expressed as forcefully by participants as the other types of barriers, the bureaucracy of complaining was often expressed by participants whose English language skills were not good (such as recently arrived migrants) or whose literacy skills were poor (such as some Travellers and Gypsies).
- **Outcome barriers** were related to the perceived way in which the police would handle and respond to the complaint. For many, the decision to complain included weighing up the potential likelihood of any such complaint having a positive outcome, against the relative 'hassle' of complaining. As such, the fact that many participants believed that lodging a complaint would make no difference (either to themselves personally, or to the police at large) acted as a powerful disincentive to complaining.

were a number of suggestions for improvements which were common across a majority of subgroups:

- Any system should be as accessible and inclusive as possible. As such, there should be a variety of ways of getting in contact with the relevant organisation – including face-to-face, via the telephone, or through lodging a complaint via a 'proxy' member of the community. Some of these options already exist but awareness of this was very low.
- Many participants were unaware of the details of how to make a complaint about police behaviour. As such, links between the police and local community groups (such as youth leaders, or members of the Citizens Advice Bureau) were seen as a good way of raising awareness.
- Participants seemed to be overwhelmingly in favour of an independent organisation to which to make complaints, rather than one that is part of, or aligned to the police – with the proviso that it would still have some impact on the police and the way in which officers and other staff members behave. Awareness and understanding of the current system, including the role of the Independent Police Complaints Commission, was low across all the discussion groups.

Respondents' views on developing a new complaints system

Participants were also asked to put themselves in the place of policymakers, and to make suggestions as to how they would develop an improved complaints system. Whilst responses differed to an extent by demographics, there

1 Introduction

Perceptions of the police
perceptions of the police

Barriers to complaining
barriers to complaining

Awareness of the IPCC
awareness of the IPCC

Perceptions of complaining
perceptions of complaining



This chapter introduces
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In England and Wales, police accountability has traditionally been characterised as having three ‘pillars’: accountability to the law, accountability to police authorities, and accountability through the police complaints system (Reiner, 2000). As such, the ability of the general public to lodge complaints when appropriate is seen as a central part of police accountability. Commentators on the complaints system have emphasised the importance of maintaining the confidence of the general public in a system perceived as being thorough, impartial, transparent and just (Maguire and Corbett, 1991; Harrison and Cunneen, 2000).

However, despite moving towards greater external powers of supervision, a number of criticisms of the complaints system in England and Wales have been levelled by academic and official commentators. In particular, concerns were raised that the system did not inspire an adequate degree of confidence (Home Affairs Select Committee, 1997; Reiner, 2000; KPMG, 2000; Harrison and Cunneen, 2000).

Calls to improve public trust and confidence through greater transparency can be traced back to the early 1980s (Scarman, 1981; Brown, 1988; Maguire and Corbett, 1991; KPMG, 2000; Harrison and Cunneen, 2000) and by the late 1990s the need for change was also reflected in a parliamentary report (Home Affairs Select Committee, 1997) which concluded that independent investigation into police misconduct would be desirable, not least because it would boost public confidence in the system.

This crucial issue of independence (something which is also reflected in the research presented here) not only affects public opinion, but also has an impact on wider police relations with the public. For example, a lack of confidence in the existing system was seen to mean that people were unwilling to complain because they did not feel that they would be treated fairly or impartially. This was particularly true amongst groups who have traditionally had low levels of confidence in the police – such as young people and ethnic minorities (Scarman, 1981; Bowling and Phillips, 2002; Kennison, 2002). The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry raised some of these concerns in relation to ethnic minorities by stating that “investigation of police officers by their own or another police service is widely regarded as unjust and does not inspire public confidence” (Macpherson, 1999).

Criticism of the police complaints system led to a series of significant reforms, outlined in the Police Reform Act 2002¹.

The reforms were intended to improve the experience of complainants and make the complaints system more accessible, timely and proportionate. The Act therefore broadened the range of people who can make a complaint; in addition to those directly affected by police misconduct, complaints can also be made by those who allege that they have been adversely affected by police misconduct, by witnesses and by those acting on behalf of someone who is making a complaint. The group of people that can be complained about has also been expanded. This means that complaints can be made against all police staff, including civilian support staff, police community support officers, and traffic wardens, as well as sworn police officers.

The way of dealing with less serious complaints has also been revised and is now known as ‘local resolution’. The Act created the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) which replaced the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) and began full operation in April 2004. Complainants now have the right of appeal to the IPCC; they can appeal in relation to their complaint not being recorded, how their complaint was processed under local resolution, or if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of an investigation.

The IPCC has a duty under the Act to increase public confidence in the police complaints system in England and Wales and, in so doing, to contribute to increasing confidence in the police as a whole. This aim is the basis of the IPCC’s guardianship function, which includes setting, monitoring, inspecting and reviewing standards for the operation of the police complaints system, promoting confidence, ensuring accessibility of the system, and promoting policing excellence by drawing out and feeding back learning.

In order to improve accessibility to the complaints system, complaints can be made directly to the IPCC via its Telephone Complaints Centre (TCC) and in writing. Complaints received in this way are passed back to the individual police force, which records and deals with them. The majority of less serious complaints are dealt with by police force professional standards departments. However, under the Police Reform Act 2002 incidents which involve death or serious injury must be referred to the IPCC. The IPCC is then responsible for deciding what type of investigation is suitable for the complaint. The IPCC may independently investigate some incidents, such as those involving death or serious injury and allegations of serious or organised corruption, racism or perverting the course of justice.

¹ It is important to note that the PRA does not cover complaints about police policy matters. These ‘direction and control’ complaints are dealt with under separate procedures (see Home Office Circular 19/2005). This would include, for example, complaints relating to a lack of police officers being deployed to a particular area.

In terms of using the police complaints process, results from the British Crime Survey (BCS) 2004/05 found that of those people who were really annoyed with the police, 14% made or tried to make a complaint (2% of all those interviewed). Among those who had not made or tried to make a complaint, the main reason was that the respondent saw no benefit in doing so (67%). One per cent of respondents said they did not make a complaint because they could not understand the complaints procedure and 5% said they did not know to whom they could complain. For those who did make a complaint, or tried to, only around a fifth were very or fairly satisfied with the way in which it was handled by the police.

A survey of the general population

To measure public confidence, awareness and willingness to use the complaints system, the IPCC commissioned a survey which enabled a national baseline to be established which could be used to track trends over time and provide an indication of whether the perceived problems of public awareness, dissatisfaction and lack of trust could be overcome. The survey found that the majority of people were willing to complain, were aware of the IPCC and believed it to be independent of the police, impartial in its decision-making and fair in its treatment of complainants. However, it also emerged that there were certain key groups who were either sceptical of the complaints system or disinclined to use it (Docking and Bucke, 2006).

These groups included:

- Young people;
- Men;
- People from lower socio-economic groups;
- Ethnic minorities and
- Those who had recently had contact with the police (particularly those who felt the contact had been negative).

Previous research into other complaints systems has produced similar findings, especially amongst young men (Ostermeyer, 2004; National Audit Office, 2005). Ethnic minorities were also found to be more worried about police harassment or other consequences if they complained. These findings, as noted by Docking and Bucke (2006), suggest that *“the key target groups for the IPCC to focus on in the future are those which are traditionally seen as having high levels of police contact”*.

There were several other groups which it was not possible to include in the survey, but who are traditionally thought of as having less confidence and trust in the police

(Stonewall, 1996; CRE, 2004; Docking, 2003). These people may therefore be more likely to have less confidence in, or awareness of, the complaints process.

These groups included:

- Gay and Lesbian people;
- Members of the travelling community and
- People for whom English is not their first language.

For these reasons it was also deemed appropriate to investigate the views, feelings and perceptions of these groups towards the complaints process.

Aim of the study

The IPCC commissioned Ipsos-MORI to undertake a programme of qualitative research to explore and expand on some of the issues raised by the previous quantitative work, including the exploration of the views of certain key groups who were less likely to have heard of the IPCC, less willing to complain and/or more sceptical of both the police and the complaints system.

The main aims of this research were:

- To explore and articulate the views of certain key groups, identified in the IPCC survey and in previous research, on issues surrounding their willingness to complain, their awareness and perception of the IPCC, and their overall confidence in the complaints system.
- To understand why there are differences in the views of these key groups in terms of trust, communication, awareness and confidence in the complaints system.
- To identify and explore possible future improvements to the complaints system and the support of potential complainants, through the findings gained in the discussion groups and through formulating recommendations as to how the issues raised should be addressed.

Methodology

The core programme consisted of 20 discussion groups and mini-groups from the groups identified as less willing to make a complaint or more sceptical of the system. These groups included a variety of Black and Ethnic Minority mini-groups, alongside general public discussion groups of different language abilities, and included participants from rural and urban areas, of different ages and social classes, and with varying levels of contact with the police.

As well as the 20 discussion and mini-groups, the research also targeted a number of other traditionally ‘hard-to-reach’ groups, including Gypsies/Travellers, Lesbian and Gay people, and people who spoke English as a second language. Groups involving those for whom English was a second language were conducted with the help of translators.

Recruitment

Gypsies/ Travellers	
2 mini-groups	
1 x mixed group:	Poundbury, Dorset
1 x mixed group:	Milton Keynes
Lesbian and Gay people	
4 mini-groups	
2 x Gay males:	Brighton
2 x Gay females:	Manchester
People with poor English skills	
8 depth interviews	
3 x Polish speakers:	Edgware, London
3 x Arabic speakers:	Edgware, London
2 x Hindi speakers:	Southall, London

MORI’s qualitative field recruiters were responsible for recruitment. Recruitment was carried out face-to-face in-home or in areas local to where the participants lived. The discussion groups and mini-groups were held in local village halls or hotels. The only exceptions to this recruitment pattern were the Gypsy/Traveller groups, who were recruited with the help of local council Traveller Liaison Service Officers.

Analysis

Initial analysis took place immediately after each depth interview or group discussion, when moderators would complete a set of fieldnotes and then later brainstorm key findings together. Each moderator then reviewed the audio recording and transcription to record participant views, verbatim comments and their own interpretations. In order to analyse and interpret thoroughly the information collected, an analysis package called Xsight was used. Once all the data had been entered into Xsight, the research team then began to identify underlying patterns and

themes within the data.

Structure of the report

A summary outlining some of the main themes to emerge in this document is included at the front of this report.

Following this introduction, the report contains the following chapters:

- Chapter 2 introduces a basic typology, devised as part of this research, to help understand participants’ views.
- Chapter 3 explores the perceptions of the police, the complaints procedure and the IPCC.
- Chapter 4 takes an in-depth look at barriers to complaining. This examines the cultural complaints about ‘expected’ police behaviour, barriers related to police reactions, and process and outcome-related barriers to making a complaint against the police.
- Chapter 5 looks at the views on developing a new complaints system, set in the context of perceptions of other similar organisations.
- Chapter 6 details our recommendations and conclusions.

Details of the topic guide and the software used to analyse the results can be found in Appendices A and B respectively. A recruitment matrix, showing the composition of the discussion and mini-groups, can be found in Appendix C.

2

Participant typology



1 -

This chapter introduces the views used in this report towards the police. We have grouped these views into four characteristics to help you understand the data.

It is important to note that the data in this report is based on a large-scale survey of public opinion. It is not the public's views on the police, but rather a general public opinion survey.

The good news is that the public's views on the police (e.g. the type of complaints) are generally positive, such as

This chapter introduces our use of a basic typology used in this report to help us understand participants' views towards the police and the complaints process. We have grouped people together in terms of shared characteristics that we describe below.

It is important to bear in mind that while a cross-section of different types of people took part in this qualitative research, this was not designed to be a large-scale representative study. The typology we have developed therefore represents those who took part, not the public as a whole. Further quantitative research would be required to test whether we could extrapolate the findings for these groups to the wider general public.

The groups were determined by: attitudes towards the police (e.g. feeling positive or negative towards them), type of experience of the police, demographic factors such as age, gender and sexuality, and 'culture and community'. When analysing 'culture and community', ethnicity, faith and geographical location have been explored.

We have identified three broad strands of opinion:

- 'Pro-police';
- 'Passive Sceptics' and
- 'Highly Disengaged'.

Pen pictures of the typology

The following section helps to personalise the typology by describing a typical member of each group. It is important to emphasise that this typology is intended to illustrate the variety of different opinions and perceptions expressed in this research. As categories developed through qualitative research, they are not designed to be all-encompassing for all participants at all times; rather, they should be treated as 'ideal types'. In reality there may be overlap between the groups.

'Pro-police'

These people tended to be the most positive in their assessment of the police service and the complaints system, and therefore had the highest engagement.

A typical member of this group would be aged 25 years and older, living in a rural area. He or she would not have had any negative contact, or any negative contact that would have left a lasting impact on their opinion of the police, and would believe that the police have a tough job to do.

People that are newly arrived in the United Kingdom were also often members of this group. These participants often had a positive image of the 'British Bobby' formed in their

country of origin, often contrasting their perceptions of the police in the UK with forces abroad perceived as "corrupt" or "inefficient".

A third strand of membership of this group was those who had experienced negative contact with the police in the past, and had come to expect similar experiences – but had since been pleasantly surprised by very positive police contact, and consequently now felt more favourable towards the police. Key examples of these were the Gay and Lesbian participants interviewed in Brighton and Manchester. As some of these people had experienced a poor relationship with the police in other areas they lived in, the very positive contact they had, in the main, since experienced meant they now felt much more positively about their local force. This is attributed to the effort made by local police to recognise and confront any possible tensions with these groups. It is worth noting that Gay and Lesbian participants appeared in both 'Pro-police' and 'Passive Sceptic' groups. However, it is important to recognise that this finding may be specific to areas where a lot of liaison work has been done between the Gay community and the police.

'Passive Sceptics'

This group claims the biggest membership out of the three groups. A typical member of this group would broadly favour the police force for stability and maintenance of law and order, but have a number of criticisms of the way in which the police operate. They would also vary in their views and opinions of what they believe the police complaints system to be but, in the main, would be willing to use the complaints system.

A 'Passive Sceptic' would typically have had "mild" negative contact, citing, for example, a lack of police response or a late response to calls; the police not keeping people updated on cases; and the police not being as proactive as it is thought they should have been.

A member of this group would probably not have had a negative experience that was severe enough for them to really distrust the police and the complaints system. Rather, it was the frequency of mildly negative contact that made them more sceptical. The young 'Passive Sceptics' who lived in rural/semi-rural areas tended to trust the police slightly more than those in urban areas. This is possibly because they had less negative contact with the police, or knew of fewer people who had negative contact. There were also some 25 to 34-year-old 'Passive Sceptics' in rural areas who had mildly negative contact, but still trusted the police. It is possible that these people's mildly negative contact with the police had not been frequent. However, if this frequency was to increase, it is likely they, like several participants from rural areas, would fall into the 'Highly Disengaged' group.

Some of the Chinese participants aged 35 or over fell into this group. Again, this mildly negative experience seemed to refer to response times, but there was also a lot of respect “for the job the police are trying to do”.

This group also included some Gay or Lesbian participants, again from areas where it appeared that a lot of liaison work had been done to counteract any tensions. They had previously experienced negative contact, and could appreciate that relationships between Gay people and the police were historically poor; however, the frequency of positive contact lifted them out of the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group. As a result of liaison work, and efforts by the police in those specific areas to “build bridges”, these participants did trust the police. It is most likely that, if these people continue to have good relationships with the police in their areas, they may move to the ‘Pro-police’ group.

A number of Gypsies and Travellers also fell into the ‘Passive Sceptic’ group. This shows how different types of policing in different areas, and the use of particular engagement strategies, can influence perceptions of the police and views of the police complaints process.

Several Asian people from younger and older age brackets (Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani) also fell into this group, having experienced contact with the police (neither ‘positive’ nor ‘negative’ in nature) but still feeling distrust towards the police, although not to the same extent as the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group. Following the London terrorist attacks in July 2005 there is a perception amongst some of the Asian community, particularly Asian males, that they are being targeted by the police. This is exacerbating distrust of the police, and therefore the police complaints system. Direct experience of being stopped and searched by the police under these circumstances may be likely to move Asian ‘Passive Sceptics’ closer towards the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group.

What is striking about the ‘Passive Sceptic’ group is that, despite this large mix of people, it did not contain many young Black African/Black Caribbean people, Gypsies or Travellers.

‘Highly Disengaged’

The people in this group were primarily young Black or Asian people, predominantly young men, and Gypsy/Traveller groups whose perception of their relationship with the police was described as being almost exclusively antagonistic. This resulted in a negative view of how the participants falling into this group believed the police complaints system operated, and how they believed they would use the system – some were quite likely to claim they would not be willing to use it at all. This group was particularly marked in its segmentation away from the

other participants. However, it is important to stress that this was not a large-scale representative study, and findings cannot be used to extrapolate about the wider population.

A ‘Highly Disengaged’ participant would be likely to have had particularly negative contact with the police, for example, alleged verbal abuse and numerous experiences of stop and search, and therefore be most distrustful. These people would also be generally distrustful of the complaints procedure, with many having stated the first point of contact if they wanted to complain would be a solicitor. They would typically be highly sceptical of the attitude of the police and believed that they were personally targeted by the police.

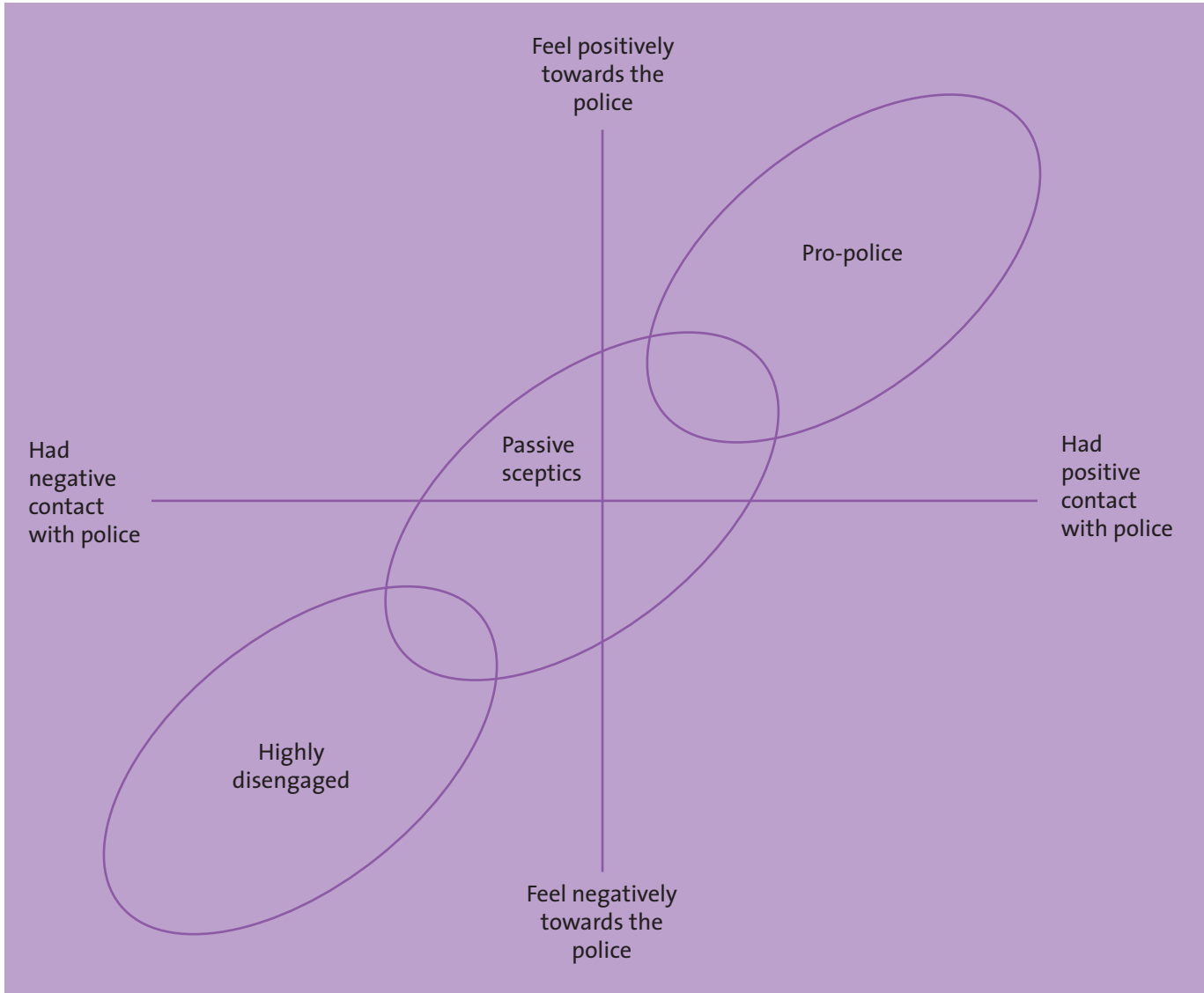
Some participants would use some quite extreme language, referring to the police as ‘corrupt’. Although not always able to support this with evidence from personal experience, it was a strongly held view developed over time and as a result of repeated negative incidents with the police. Some of this group would not use the complaints system at all due to fear of police reprisals or a lack of confidence in any system they believe is, or could be linked to, the police. Others would use the system, but only if they had what they would believe to be clearly documented evidence of any wrongdoing by the police.

Several Black and Asian female participants also appeared in this group; several of those had not had direct negative experiences themselves but were still distrustful of the police. In some cases this was because they felt that friends or family had been badly treated by the police. However, because the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group was made up of particular cultural groups, this could reflect a general cultural sway towards distrust of the police, and therefore the complaints system.

The typology of participants is illustrated in Figure 1 overleaf. The bands representing the different groups overlap, representing the fluid boundary between each group.

The model reflects the findings of this research, that one of the strongest drivers of perceptions of the complaints system is the level of personal contact with the police. In general, those participants who reported positive contact with the police tended to also be those who developed the most faith in the complaints process. Conversely, those participants who have had a negative contact with the police tend to be much more suspicious of the validity of the complaints process. This point is expanded on in Chapter 3.

Figure 1
Typology of participants



NB: most participants had some contact with the police so the mid-point of this figure does not represent 'no contact'.

A note on urban and rural areas **Summary**

The discussion groups and depth interviews were held in a mixture of rural and urban areas across the country, in order to provide a broad cross-section of opinion from a wide range of different types of area. Whilst this approach allows us to compare the views and experiences of those living in rural and urban areas, it is also important to recognise that perceptions of urban and rural participants will be driven not only by their geographical location, but also by the specific culture and priorities of the local police force, and it is therefore not possible to separate these factors out in the analysis.

The majority of the participants broadly fell into three attitudinal groups: 'Pro-police', 'Passive Sceptic' and 'Highly Disengaged'. Having identified these broad strands of opinion we used them to understand and predict how well different people would engage with the complaints process. This introduction has outlined the type of characteristics each group exemplifies.

The following chapter uses the typology to discuss perceptions of the police and the complaints process, and links the different groupings and demographic groups to overarching perceptions of the complaints procedure.

3

Perceptions of the police and the IPCC

This chapter outlines the three broad groups set out in our typology which have been used to examine patterns of beliefs about the police and the IPCC.

Whilst immediate perceptions of the police formed a relatively small part of the discussions, it was clear that this area heavily influenced views of the complaints procedure in general, and the likelihood of making a complaint in particular. Initial perceptions of the police varied significantly amongst participants, from a sympathetic attitude towards a vocation viewed as “difficult”, “demanding” or “thankless”, to an explicitly hostile view of the police as repressive, discriminatory, and completely out of touch with day-to-day concerns. The recent Richard Dimbleby Lecture by Sir Ian Blair illustrates some of the negative perceptions held by many participants of the police as a profession.

“For a long time, the police service was...the preserve of the striving; lower-middle class, predominantly White, predominantly male.”

Sir Ian Blair, The Richard Dimbleby Lecture, 16/11/05

Ethnicity, religion, and (to a lesser extent) age were the demographic factors which most commonly differentiated perceptions here, whilst perceptions of the police were also often driven by personal contact with officers.

The typology identified earlier helped us examine the differing perceptions of the police and of the IPCC. The following sections set out in more detail the characteristics of these groups in relation to the way they viewed the police.

‘Pro-police’

Older, White, more affluent participants typically expressed the most positive view of the police force. Participants in this group tended to have had very little (if any) contact with the police, but perceived them to be a positive force, crucial for the maintenance of law and order within society, and (broadly) a public service, there to help.

“We’d be lost without them a bit really, wouldn’t we? If we didn’t have them, there’d be mayhem, wouldn’t there?”

Female, White, 25-34, Cardiff

“I’ve got 100% confidence ... because I know they do the job ... 100% confidence, I’ve got in [the police].”

Female, Mixed Race, 16-24, Birmingham

“When I was younger, I was into riding motorbikes and that sort of thing. And generally, people complaining about us. We were just on wasteland. And so the police came along and just said, ‘look, here, if it was up to me, I’d let you carry on, but we’ve had complaints so you have to stop.’ And that’s fair enough.”

Male, general public, 25-34, East Anglia

The contact this group had with the police tended to be positive contact – that is, contact participants personally initiated, for example, asking the police for directions, making use of the police as a helpful resource. The group also seemed to recognise the wider work the police do, as well as arresting offenders. This sort of contact contrasted with subgroups who had a more problematic relationship with the police, and whose contact was more often initiated by the police and often perceived as being aggressive or antagonistic, rather than benign.

“[Perception of the police is] fairly good really. They’ve got more presence if you’re out of a night-time, which I think is good. That’s really the only contact I’ve had with the police.”

Male, White, 25-34, East Anglia

“I find the police quite helpful sometimes. But it’s not really for crime ... Even directions though, it’s not even something that the police are probably meant to be there for. I suppose they’re meant to do community relations and stuff as well, but I use them mainly for that purpose.”

Male, White, 16-24, Brighton

Another group of participants who were more likely to become advocates of the police were those who had recently experienced a good level of service, or who felt that the police had gone out of their way to be particularly helpful.

“My friend got beaten up, he was in hospital, but the police they really did try to help him ... and they were trying their best to find out the real... suspects.”

Female, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Tower Hamlets

Another subgroup who tended to have a very positive view of the police were migrants newly arrived in Britain². These participants often had an upbeat image of the British police officer as fair, helpful and incorruptible, often comparing them positively with the police in their country of origin.

“Originally I’m from India. I was born in India. I know the police in India so, they’re better [in England] than [in] India.”

Male, Indian, 16-24, Derby

“I love the policemen in this country because they’re so friendly and when we see the policemen we’ll be feeling very calm.”

Male, Chinese, 16-24, Greenwich

² This was not the case with the Somalian group. This may be related to a death following police contact in the local Somalian community in Plumstead, London.

“With quick action, they come and resolve the problem within two or three minutes. These is what I like about the police here.”

Male, Indian, 18-34, Southall

It was striking that this positive view of the police was reported by newly-arrived migrants with a variety of ethnic and class backgrounds. Migrants from Poland, India, Pakistan and China were interviewed for this project, and the majority had an initially positive view of the British police. These perceptions tended to be based upon preconceptions about the police in the UK, however, rather than direct contact.

‘Passive Sceptics’

The second group of participants also had views of the police which were again broadly positive. However, this attitude was balanced by a generally more critical preconception of the way in which resources were directed, and how certain officers behaved. Areas for improvement were more likely to be mentioned by this group, for example, and they were more likely to be critical of the conduct of particular officers.

“It’s a hard job to do. You shouldn’t expect them to be all-knowing, and all-powerful, which I think a lot of people do.”

Male, White, 16-24, Brighton

However, these criticisms were often balanced with the recognition that the police were only human, and that they worked in a challenging profession where day-to-day work involved making tough judgements in difficult situations.

“Some mistakes are acceptable, ‘cos no one’s perfect.”

Male, White, 16-24, Brighton

“They’re just alright; they’re doing their job aren’t they?”

Male, Pakistani, 16-24, Slough

Often, criticisms made within this group tended to be around the level of service provided by the police – that there were not enough officers on the street, or that they spent too much of their time with unnecessary paperwork, that their response times were too slow, or that they spent too much of their time concentrating on minor crimes, rather than catching more dangerous offenders. This group’s contact with the police tended to involve reporting minor crimes, or committing minor offences (particularly driving offences) rather than the more combative contact experienced by the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group.

“I think they ought to be stricter when the pubs close, with people coming out drunk ... Under-age drinking’s a big

thing, round this area.”

Female, White, 25-34, East Anglia

A common criticism amongst this group was that the police have fallen victim to ‘political correctness’ – a term which was not usually defined with precision by participants, but in the context of the police was often used to refer to perceptions of a high degree of bureaucracy within the service, which tended to prevent officers from being a more highly visible presence on the streets.

Indeed these views are supported by a body of quantitative evidence, such as MORI research (Page et al, 2003). A national poll asked respondents to prioritise “two or three things that would most improve the police service.” Two-thirds chose “more police on the beat”, with none of the other options coming close to receiving the same level of support. However, the complaints that are relevant to this piece of work concern those surrounding individual officer conduct, and not general concerns about more policy-orientated direction and control issues. Participants without direct negative experience of officer conduct would tend to generalise on well-established ‘more bobbies on the beat’ concerns rather than matters of police conduct in which the IPCC may get involved.

“There seems to be so much bureaucracy these days about political correctness and having to deal with them in this way and that way, that they’re [the police] completely ineffective. Their power is diminished because of bureaucracy.”

Male, White, 16-24, Brighton

Of particular concern to the younger members of the ‘Passive Sceptic’ group was the level of unfair stereotyping they were exposed to by the police – leading to what they perceived to be a certain level of harassment.

“I think [the police] stereotype a lot [for instance if they see] kids [in a] good car [and think]: ‘oh they must be into drugs, how can they afford the car?’ [Whereas] maybe [if] it’s a middle-aged man about 30, 40 in a good car they think, ‘oh yeah good job’, when they might be people who are into drugs and crime and stuff like that and they’re less likely to stop them about their car than they are...younger [people].”

Female, Indian, 16-24, Bristol

“I used to hang about in large groups, and the police just come up and say, ‘stop doing this, you’re not allowed to hang around in large groups around here.’ And being typical teenagers, we used to rebel. And they used to get a lot of milk bottles in their faces, and stuff like that.”

Male, White, 16-24, Brighton

Much of the criticism made of the police by this second group was constructive, and not totally damning of the police's performance. Unlike 'Highly Disengaged' participants, the attitude of this group towards the police was not one of complete opposition: they would happily call on the police in an emergency, and were still broadly in favour of the institution as a whole. Rather, their attitude, comments and criticisms tended to be directed towards specific officers or policies.

"The majority [of police officers] do try their best to do...the best by the public, but there are a few rotten apples, so...from my experience with the police I just, I felt patronised and just that they were behaving like, being rude towards me and being ignorant towards me."

Female, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Tower Hamlets

"I think in serious crimes, murders or rapes and things like that, they're probably fantastic, they're probably second-to-none. But...as the seriousness comes down, I think...they've got less funding in those sort of areas at the moment, [so there is]...less confidence in them as the crimes become less serious."

Male, White, 25-34, Cardiff

The 'Passive Sceptic' group constituted the largest proportion of participants, and included members from a wide cross-section of demographic groups. However, this group was less likely to contain young people from ethnic minority groups.

'Highly Disengaged'

This third group was the most highly dissatisfied with the police. Largely consisting of young, ethnic minority males from less affluent backgrounds, this group was highly disaffected, viewing the influence of the police as almost uniformly negative. Unlike other groups, 'Highly Disengaged' participants tended to perceive all police officers with a great deal of suspicion, viewing their motives with distrust. This group often attached nefarious intent to officers, interpreting their actions as corrupt or self-interested, and tending to discount any suggestion that the police can be of positive benefit to the local community.

"Like most people I'd say I hate police, just in general. I think a lot of Asians hate police, especially guys."

Female, Indian, 16-24, Bristol

Second-hand accounts of alleged misconduct could have as negative an impact as personal experience.

"A Black man's calling for help doesn't mean nothing [to the police]...They put drugs in my friend's house, and said it's his drugs. They put drugs on my friend, all those type of things."

All of that, they're just...crooked."

Male, Black African, 16-24, Hackney

This group tended to have some of the highest levels of negative contact with the police. In contrast to the 'Pro-police' group, 'Highly Disengaged' participants were extremely unlikely to approach the police for help in all but the most extreme circumstances, such as those in which they considered themselves or loved ones in great physical danger. The vast majority of contact for this group was initiated by the police.

A perception of racism on the part of police officers was perhaps the most common reason for the negative attitude to the police amongst this group. Young Asian and Black males in particular were more likely to report racist attitudes amongst police officers, or to interpret their contact with police officers as racist in motivation.

At their most serious, reports of racist abuse amongst this group included reports of arbitrary arrest or police mistreatment, as well as verbal abuse.

*"...They proper call you monkey and ni**er. Most of the undercover [officers]...around here, they call you ni**er...f***ing ni**er and monkey."*

Male, Black African, 16-24, Hackney

*"... and the coppers just pull you over and they're like 'f***er you P**i...get in'..."*

Male, Pakistani, 16-24, Slough

There was a particular concern amongst many participants that they were unfairly stereotyped as troublemakers, or people that commit crime, by the police, again resulting in a somewhat negative relationship. It is important to consider the impact here of indirect contact – the beliefs held by this group were as strongly held by those who had not had personal experience of incivility or abusive contact with the police as those who had. Endorsement of these views by friends, family and the wider community had a clear impact.

"One thing I'd say, when I'm driving with my friends...cruising around, they always tend to...pull us over in some sort of way. I wouldn't say all the time, but the majority of the time they do. If they see a bunch of us, it's a definite they'll pull you over."

Male, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Derby

Other common complaints from Black and Asian participants included a certain degree of more 'low-level' harassment. For example, participants mentioned being stopped by the police more frequently than their White counterparts, or a fear that the police were likely to take a more sympathetic attitude to the concerns of White people than those of their Black counterparts.

“They’re [the police] just more aggressive towards...Asian people, because I’ve seen [the] police deal with White people as well, and...from what I’ve seen...they’re less aggressive, more calm and understanding, more polite, far more polite [with White people]. Whereas when it’s with Asian people...I think they feel as if they have to be more firm because of all the stereotypes and things like that.”

Female, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Tower Hamlets

Another common complaint was that the police often acted in a provocative manner designed to elicit a reaction, so that they could have an excuse to make an arrest.

“They’re racist...when there’s more than one police officer they like to intimidate you to try and make you get angry so they can arrest you. So their whole attitude towards people is that everyone’s a criminal and they don’t give a damn, that’s all it is.”

Male, Black Caribbean, 16-24, Brixton

Of particular concern to Asian and Muslim participants within this group was the feeling that they had been more heavily targeted by the police following the recent terrorist attacks in London in July 2005 and the USA in September 2001. Again, the contact that this group have had with the police (particularly contact instigated by the police) was perceived as being aggressive or racist in character, contributing to a negative impression.

“I think since the stuff that’s kicked off [London terrorist attacks] and it’s throughout the whole Muslim community at the moment, is that if you have a beard and you go...to the mosque five times a day, then you’re going to be looked at in a different way, which is a problem...they look at the local mosques as acts of terrorism.”

Male, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Derby

“At the moment, since 9/11...when I hear the word police, I think of terrorism. Terrorism and...that’s it. Propaganda. The treatment from the police has [got] worse [since] 9/11.”

Female, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Tower Hamlets

Type of and level contact

Participants across all subgroups experienced a wide variety of sorts of contact with the police, ranging from reporting minor crime such as petty theft, to being stopped for a small legal infringement such as speeding, to either reporting, or (in a small number of cases) being arrested for more serious offences such as assault or charges of drug dealing.

In general, those in the ‘Passive Sceptic’ group tended to have experienced the most limited amount of contact with the police, whilst those with stronger feelings towards the complaints system (whether positive or negative) tended

to have had the greater amount of contact. However, caution should be exercised in interpreting the results due to the limited number of participants.

As well as the amount of contact with police, there were also variations within subgroups about the type of contact. In general, the contact that the ‘Pro-police’ group had tended to be initiated by the participants themselves, and often involved the police providing a ‘service’ role, either when directly assisting them (asking an officer for directions, for example) or when receiving a report of a crime.

“I think because they’re a public service, there’s a lot of pressure on them to be always positive and nice and stuff.”

Female, White, 25-34, Cardiff

By contrast, the contact made with the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group tended to be frequently initiated by the police (for example, via ‘stop and search’ powers) and was far more likely to be perceived as “aggressive” or “unnecessary” contact.

“Because we’re Black, they [the police] will want to stop us and search us for no reason. Not everyone...do[es] drug deals or whatever...”

Female, Black Caribbean, 16-24, Bristol

In both the ‘Pro-police’ and ‘Highly Disengaged’ groups, the sort of contact experienced tended to reinforce the prevailing perceptions of the police. So, the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group had negative perceptions of the police, which were reinforced by their experience of contact with officers. The ‘Pro-police’ group by contrast tended to be predisposed to feel positively about officers, and these positive feelings were often boosted by their contact with officers.

However, this contact with the police is obviously ever-changing and there is fluidity in movement between participants and their relevant groupings. This is especially so on the fringes of the ‘Passive Sceptic’ grouping. These are the people that are bordering on the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group and the ‘Pro-police’ group. Any positive or negative contact; something directly linked with attitudes to police (and in turn the police complaints process) could affect the grouping of the participant.

Regional issues

A number of participants took a more nuanced view of the police, differentiating between the behaviour of different forces. This view was particularly common amongst participants in areas with a strong local identity or reputation, and this differentiation was both positive and negative. For example, Gay residents of some areas (such as

Brighton) commented positively on the attitude of the police in the local area, noting their willingness to engage with members of the Gay community, and noting their understanding and tolerant attitude.

"I think that's the benefit we've got in Brighton, I feel down here the police actually work with the Gay community where through living in London the police make you feel like they're putting up with the Gay community: 'oh another poof complaining'. But down here they actually seem to pay attention 'cos they've realised what a force we are in this town."

Male, White, Gay, Mixed Age Group, Brighton

"They introduced training sessions for the police to try and get rid of open homophobia within the police force, so we can now actually speak with [them] and feel relaxed about dealing with matters in general with the police."

Male, White, Gay, Mixed Age Group, Brighton

A similar attitude was reported by Travellers from Dorset, who believed that the police in Dorset and in Avon and Somerset were considerably more sympathetic than other forces in dealing with the travelling community.

"I think they've chilled out quite a lot - the police in recent years - I think they have more. They have...less antagonism towards Travellers and everything's a bit less aggressive. But maybe that's just in this area."

M *"[The police in] the Downs and Yorkshire; they're still b**stards."*

Travellers, Mixed Age Group, Dorset

However, there was also concern amongst certain participants that their local force had a particularly unhelpful attitude when compared to police nationally.

"I think they're [the police in Brixton] worse than a lot of police."

Male, Black Caribbean, 16-24, Brixton

"It's what area you're in as well...I'd say you're five times more likely to get stopped [or] get your ID pulled out in somewhere like Whitefield or somewhere north of Radcliffe, I suppose. [And] Moss Side is known for crime, it's known for drugs, it's known for guns. So they think everybody in Moss Side's...doing drugs, doing everything...so [you are] more likely to get stopped walking down the street [there] than you are elsewhere..."

Male, Mixed Race, 16-24, Moss Side

Perceptions of the IPCC

When recruited, participants were not initially informed that the discussion groups were for the IPCC. Rather,

participants were told that the groups were about perceptions of the police, and perceptions and experience of complaining. The reason for this was that one of the aims of the topic guide was to allow perceptions (if any) of the IPCC to emerge naturally throughout the progress of the group. Indeed, it was only at the end of the discussion groups that participants were informed that the IPCC had commissioned the research.

In practice, however, without explicit prompting from moderators, there was a very low level of recognition of the IPCC amongst all the subgroups.

"But no one knows about this organisation, well I don't know about it anyway. If I did have a complaint I wouldn't know where to go."

Male, Mixed Race, 16-24, Moss Side

Those participants who had heard of the IPCC – a small minority – tended to vaguely associate it with high level investigations into serious offences – and in particular the investigation into the police shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell underground station.

"It's something Independent Police Commission or something; I know it's in the media [and] related to 7-7, with the whole shoot-to-kill case with the guy, the Brazilian bloke."

Female, Chinese, 16-24, Greenwich

"It's [the IPCC] used when people, police officers are being investigated 'cos they're corrupt."

Female, Black Caribbean, 16-24, Bristol

Other sources of information included hearing the IPCC mentioned on television or having come across it in a professional capacity.

"[I heard about the IPCC] at university when I was studying criminology. And on 'The Bill'."

Lesbian, White, Mixed Age Group, Manchester

Perceptions of the police complaints procedure

Despite the relatively low level of knowledge of the work of the IPCC amongst participants, many still had at least vague perceptions of what sort of complaints procedure applies to the police. Particularly striking was the high degree of convergence between perceptions of the police as a whole, and perceptions of the existence, and effectiveness, of any complaints procedure. In general, those participants with a more positive view of the police tended to also have a more positive view of the complaints system, whilst those with a more suspicious view of the police tended to have a correspondingly negative view of any complaints procedure.

Overall, there were two broad perceptions about what sort of complaints procedure is operated:

- An assumption that there is a formal complaints procedure which is broadly independent and professional. Many participants assumed that there is such a procedure or body in place, but have simply never had the need to look any further into what sort of body exists.

“I have the perception that the police nowadays are really worried about complaints, and especially looking after minority groups. So I think they’d be too scared not to do something about it.”

Male, White, Gay, Mixed Age Group, Brighton

Participants who assumed this to be the case often had a broadly positive opinion of the police (i.e. were either in the ‘Pro-Police’ or ‘Passive Sceptic’ groups discussed above), which also reflected the more positive assumptions about the police complaints procedure.

- An assumption that there is probably some sort of procedure, but one which is not necessarily independent from local police forces. People within this group also tended to think of any potential complaints procedure as being weighted in favour of the police, and tended not to have a great deal of faith in the successful outcome of any particular complaint.

“Why would they advertise the fact that they [have] got [a] complaints area or department, because that means, it’s obvious they’re going to be doing a bad job, and there’s going to be more complaints. So if they keep that quiet...then only one or two people might find out.”

Female, general public, 25-34, East Anglia

“It should be an independent commission. But I know it’s internal. I know, for a fact, that police complaints department is an internal division, which is run by the Met.”

Male, White, 16-24, Brighton

Again, there was a relationship between the opinions of this second group and their perceptions of the complaints process, with a majority of those who viewed the complaints procedure as unlikely to help them also having low levels of trust in the police.

Summary

Initial perceptions of the police varied significantly amongst participants, from the sympathetic to explicitly hostile. These perceptions also have a strong impact on perceptions of the complaints process itself. ‘Pro-police’ participants tend to be older, White and middle-class, and

tend to have the most positive perceptions of the police and, by extension, the complaints process. ‘Passive Sceptics’, by contrast, tend to have had only limited contact with the police, and as such their perceptions both of individual officers, and of the complaints procedure, are somewhat unfocussed and unclear. ‘Highly Disengaged’ participants, however, tend to often be young, Black or minority ethnic participants living in inner cities. This group have the lowest level of trust in the police, and have often experienced negative contact with officers. This group also tend to have the lowest level of faith in ‘any police complaints’ procedure.

Perceptions of the IPCC were strongly associated with broader views and attitudes towards the police. Awareness of the IPCC and its roles was low, and participants assumed that its involvement was limited to high-level incidents such as the Stockwell shooting. There was some scepticism regarding the independent status of the IPCC, the degree of negativity towards this being broadly consistent with the degree of negative feeling towards the police generally.

CHAPTER 4

The following chapter explores in detail the barriers between feeling aggrieved and making a complaint. The chapter develops the different types of barrier to making a complaint – barriers related to fears regarding police reactions, process-related barriers and outcome barriers – and discusses the different impacts that these barriers have upon different types of participant.

4 Barriers to complaining

There is a relatively small body of knowledge about the perceptions of the complaints system since the Police Reform Act of 2002. Therefore, the aim of this chapter in particular is to provide a detailed analysis of the subgroups within the general population who have in the past tended to experience a difficult relationship with the police – and are hence less likely to place a great deal of trust in any complaints system.

The decision about whether to make a complaint about the behaviour of the police is based on a variety of factors. These include pre-existing perceptions of the police, perceptions of what constitutes acceptable police conduct, and prior ideas about making a complaint. The decision is not simply predicated upon the behaviour of a given officer at a given time. One of the effects of these external factors is that many participants are put off the idea of making a complaint before they actually come into contact with the complaints process or the IPCC.

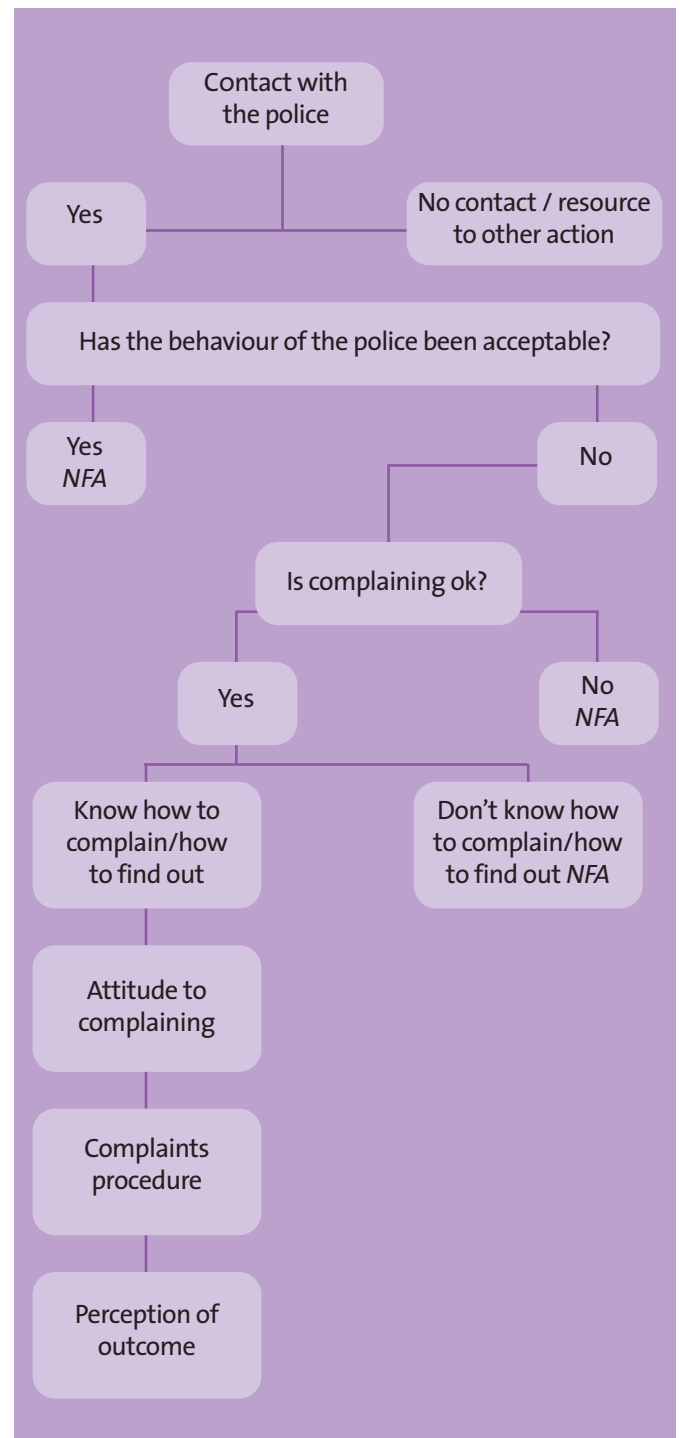
The aim of this section is to look in more detail at the barriers to making a complaint expressed by many participants. These barriers are categorised under four separate headings:

- The impact of differing cultural expectations of police behaviour and of general attitudes toward complaining.
- Barriers related to fears about the police reaction to making a complaint, including fear of reprisals or feeling intimidated about making a complaint about a body which exerts social control.
- Process-related barriers, referring to perceptions about the complexity of lodging a complaint, and to concerns that the process could be too time-consuming or complex.
- Outcome-related barriers, relating to perceptions that making a complaint may “not be worth it”, either because it is not clear what the outcome of complaining might be, or because the advantage of any particular outcome is outweighed by the time and effort involved in making a complaint.

The relative importance of these different types of barriers varied between participants. It is worth noting that sometimes there was overlap between these barriers. Occasionally, for example, a process-related barrier would be combined with an outcome barrier, vastly increasing the chance of the participant not reporting. However, for the purposes of this report, we have treated the barriers, primarily, as separate entities. As such, this chapter looks in detail at the different reasons participants gave for lodging a complaint, and discusses these in relation to the different groupings of participants discussed in Chapter 2. Figure 2 illustrates the process participants went through when deciding whether to complain. Often, this was not

consciously undertaken. It began to emerge as a result of systematic questioning over a number of discussion groups. At each decision point participants would reach a point at which a particular barrier would seem too great to pass and they would not proceed any further. This section of the report explores each barrier in detail and examine patterns in the types of people who are particularly sensitive to specific barriers.

Figure 2
Complaint decision-making tree



Cultural constructs of 'expected' police behaviour

This section outlines and explores the ways in which participants constructed ideas around what is 'expected' in terms of police behaviour and in complaining about the police.

The first barrier to making a complaint about the police consisted of varying cultural expectations of what constitutes 'appropriate' behaviour by the police. Whilst officers are governed by an explicit set of rules on what constitutes 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' behaviour in any particular situation, this research points to a much more varied interpretation by the public of what behaviour is acceptable and unacceptable by police officers and other staff. Actions which might be acceptable to one participant could be totally unacceptable to another. Such expectations were formed from both prevailing cultural attitudes towards the police and individual experiences.

There were several differences between subgroups in determining acceptability of behaviour by the police. For some, "acceptable" police behaviour included actions involving rudeness, goading by the police and being stopped and searched when it was considered that there was no apparent reason for the stop. For others, what was appropriate behaviour by the police was the same as the appropriate behaviour that should be exhibited by any other person: for example, polite and courteous behaviour and fulfilling their job role adequately. Ethnicity, and (to a lesser extent) age were the demographic factors which most commonly differentiated what was regarded as "acceptable" behaviour, whilst personal contact with officers appeared to be another driver.

The groups identified earlier, therefore, help us to examine the differing perceptions of the police and the IPCC:

'Pro-police' participants tended to be the people who had the highest expectations of the police. They believed that although the police are authority figures who should be respected, they should also abide by the same codes of conduct as civilians. They would therefore be more likely to complain if their high expectation levels were breached. In the absence of direct experience of misconduct, many participants in this subgroup tended to show concern about policy matters such as response times to burglaries, which would not form a complaint about misconduct.

"I'm lucky enough that I've never been burgled. If I had, and the police didn't turn up, I'd certainly make a complaint, whether it's normal procedure or not."
Female, 25-34, general public, East Anglia

'Pro-police' participants often discussed their expectations of officers in terms of their duty to protect the interests of the general public, and would be willing to lodge a complaint if officers did not reach the high standards of behaviour they expected.

"If you ring the police and then you call 999, you expect a response. That's the whole point of 999, certainly if they don't turn up then, I don't know if anything would be done about it. Maybe it wouldn't, maybe it would, but I'd want to complain anyway. I've got a right to complain to them if they're not doing their job properly."

Male, White, 16-24, Newcastle

As such, 'bad' attitudes or rudeness of officers were often cited as behaviour that could potentially elicit a complaint – though it is notable that many citing this sort of behaviour often could not point to specific examples from their own experience, but rather tended to rely on anecdotal stories of poor or rude behaviour from officers.

'Passive Sceptics', the largest group of participants, had mid-level expectations of the police, believing that it was acceptable, in some situations, for the police to exhibit rudeness or to stop and search people because of the current climate regarding terrorism. These participants did not tend to have a great deal of contact with the police, and as such their opinions of the police in general, and of the complaints system in particular, were somewhat less forthright.

'Highly Disengaged' participants, in contrast, tended to be those most likely to report their exposure to inappropriate behaviour by officers. Conversely, however, this group tended to be the least likely to lodge a complaint against an officer for misconduct – often because members of this group almost expected their contact with the police to be fractious or divisive. As such, for many 'Highly Disengaged' participants, the behaviour of the officers would have to be fairly serious to instigate a complaint.

"For me to make a complaint now it would have to be really serious, otherwise I wouldn't bother. If they really badly attacked me, been really rude to me or something."

Female, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Tower Hamlets

"Or it would have to be something serious isn't it, for you to complain about it, 'cos otherwise you'd think nothing's going to get done anyway."

Male, Indian, 16-24, Derby

Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian participants typically fell into the 'Highly Disengaged' group or the 'Passive Sceptic' group, and many felt examples of poor behaviour from officers were simply to be expected.

In comparison, young Black African people, particularly in less affluent, urban areas, would complain only under extreme provocation for behaviour they considered very serious, with almost all exhibiting low expectation levels of police conduct. Police behaviour such as stop and searches for “no reason” was deemed expected behaviour, even if it was considered to be racially motivated. The high frequency of occurrences participants described meant that they did not see this type of police behaviour as something to take action against. Indeed, only 3% of recorded complaints in 2005/06 were for discriminatory behaviour (Gleeson and Dady, 2006).

“I wouldn’t complain about stop and search – it’s normal.”
Male, Black African, 16-24, Hackney

The situation was similar with young Black Caribbean participants, again, primarily in less affluent, urban areas. They had come to accept behaviour where the police were “being horrible to them” on a regular basis, so felt there was no point in complaining. The exception, again, was the extreme.

“If they stuck me up [pulled out a gun] I’d definitely complain.”
Male, Black Caribbean, 16-24, Brixton

On one hand the frequency of negative contact within this group had led to a belief that it was the normal state of affairs and therefore nothing could be gained by complaining. On the other, they felt that if repeated “unnecessary” stop and searches were experienced by themselves personally this would constitute grounds for complaint.

“I think if it’s something that’s persistent then I’d be more inclined to complain.”
Male, Black Caribbean, 25-34, Bristol

Few of these differences existed in the ethnic minority groups. The majority tended to fall within the ‘Passive Sceptic’ group, but most fell into the negative side of this group. The remainder were firmly associated with the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group. It was these individuals who appeared to expect the worst behaviour from the police and expected this as the norm.

The high level of differentiation between participants’ views of what was and was not acceptable police behaviour implied that a greater emphasis could be placed on communicating to the public the level of professionalism and behaviour they could expect from the police.

Barriers related to fears about police reactions

One of the most significant barriers to complaining was the perception that by making a complaint, there was a danger of being labelled a ‘troublemaker’ by the police, and of potentially inviting some form of retribution from the authorities for complaining.

“[If] you’re one of these people complaining maybe you just feel that they might use their authority in some way towards you.”

Female, Chinese, 16-24, Greenwich

The level of concern over this issue varied somewhat between participants. At best, some participants noted that they would feel rather uncomfortable if they were faced with an officer about whom they had previously made a complaint. In particular, there was some concern that making a complaint could be interpreted as wasting police time. This sort of concern was most commonly expressed by participants belonging to the ‘Pro-police’ group – usually White, middle-class participants.

“They’re only human, after all, and if they’ve got a grudge against you, it might affect their services.”

Male, White, 16-24, Brighton

Another, more serious concern was that in making a complaint, participants might make themselves more visible to the police, or open themselves up to persecution from specific officers.

“If you made a complaint about an officer and the officer got punished he could do something back to you, because they have information about you, whereas you have no information about the police officer.”

Female, Indian, 16-24, Bristol

This concern was felt most keenly by young Black and Asian participants from urban areas, as well as some of the Gypsies and Travellers, in the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group. As discussed earlier, this group already had a low opinion of the police service, and did not wish to draw any more attention to themselves by complaining. The fact that, for this group, the majority of interaction they have had with the police was already perceived as negative meant that they were unlikely to instigate any more contact than absolutely necessary.

“So you make a complaint about him, obviously his sergeant and whatever’s going to put it to him...so next time he sees you, he’s going to have you. And if not him, he’s going to get his mates to, you know – so it’s not him, so it doesn’t come back to him. He’s going to get his mates to do exactly the same.”

Male, White, 40+, Brighton

Linked to these concerns was a fear that the police would close ranks and support each other in denying any misconduct occurred when faced with a complaint – meaning that participants saw very little advantage in complaining, since they believed it would result in very little change.

“They all stick together [if you complain].”

Female, Mixed Race, 16-24, Birmingham

Some participants took this further, suggesting that some police personnel actively tried to discourage people from complaining, or made it very difficult for those who did.

“Have you ever tried to get a policeman’s number? You ask him for the number and the first thing he did, he turned his shoulder away from you and put his hand over it. They don’t want to show you the number.”

Female, Mixed Race, 25-34, Moss Side

Another common barrier to making a complaint was the feeling that the police were a particularly powerful body, and complaining about them was a particularly intimidating prospect. This point in particular separated making a complaint against the police service from complaining about other services. Whereas the bank, local council or doctor’s surgery were primarily viewed as there to provide some sort of a service (and in the case of the bank, as wishing to maintain their customers), the police were mainly perceived as having a broader and somewhat different role. On one level, they were seen as the body to be contacted when a crime has been committed, or as an ‘emergency service’. On the other, they were also perceived as a service capable of legally exercising a certain degree of coercive force – a role which is far removed from the idea of services provided in a bank or doctor’s surgery.

This service/coercion dialectic was to a certain degree reflected in the perceptions of the complaints process within the different subgroups. Some participants (generally the ‘Pro-police’ group) spoke of the police in terms of providing a service, and their attitude to making a complaint in many ways reflects the norms of complaining about poor service.

Other participants, notably those in the ‘Highly Disengaged’ group, were very aware of the unique function the police have in terms of their ability to use force to exert social control. This had transferred into anxiety amongst some participants about making a complaint about the police, with some being fearful of possible reprisals or receiving a poor service in the future.

“You can’t really win though...you can’t really argue with the police...they enforce the law...?”

Male, Pakistani, 16-24, Slough

“Everyone has a fear of the police because, obviously, they’ve got a lot of power. The bank don’t really have a lot of power. If you don’t like what they’re doing, you can move your money somewhere else and get a different bank and you don’t have to deal with them any more. But you’ve always got to deal with the police, so you...don’t want to rock the boat in case it ends up getting worse.”

Female, Mixed Race, 25-34, Moss Side

Whilst making a complaint was an intimidating prospect to many participants (usually those in the ‘Pro-police’ group who had greater faith in the police service’s ability to action their complaint), it was particularly intimidating to ethnic minorities, and younger participants. Less affluent participants were also broadly more likely to cite anxiety as a reason for not making a complaint.

A number of groups also mentioned cultural barriers to making a complaint. Bangladeshi and Indian participants newly arrived in the UK noted that they did not come from a culture where it was appropriate (or even possible) to make complaints about the police. As such, the idea of making a complaint about the police in England was a culturally alien one.

“The older generation just can’t...make the step to go out there and speak against the police...they fear the Government, they fear the police. They think they’re here, they’re better than where they were, so they should appreciate [it] and then just...live where they are, that’s it.”

Female, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Tower Hamlets

A major barrier for participants was fear of the repercussions of making a complaint against the police. Therefore, one potential way of encouraging appropriate complaints could be to better publicise the separation of any complaints procedure against the individual officer (or their colleagues) at the centre of any accusations, from the police managers who would deal with the complaint.

Process-related barriers

These barriers relate to the actual process of complaining – or perceptions of what that process might be like. Whilst a number of process-related barriers were identified within the discussion groups and depth interviews, it was notable that, for the majority of participants, barriers of this type were less important than other barriers.

The most common process-related barrier was the worry that complaining would entail a great deal of bureaucracy.

“The process is so long ... I don’t need to be wasting time about complaints that are just going to get pushed aside.”

Male, Black Caribbean, 16-24, Brixton

Complaining was associated with filling in numerous forms, constituting a process in which any successful outcome would take a significant amount of time and may not result in any significant response, an outcome barrier we discuss later.

“You’re just producing a lot of paperwork again. Everything is typed-up paperwork all the time. All the time...and that’s all it is. All you hear is, ‘oh, too much paperwork. Sorry it took so long, the paperwork wasn’t done. Can’t deal with the situation, the paperwork wasn’t filled out properly’. There’s always a little thing that they can get away with.”

Male, White, 25-34, East Anglia

“I kind of imagine walking into a police station to make a complaint and being given a form to fill out. You sign it, you give it back to them and you never see it.”

Lesbian, Mixed Age Group, Manchester

Although most of these barriers can be explored as separate entities, there is overlap between some of the process-related barriers in making a complaint, and outcome barriers. This is likely to be because, although the process-related barriers can be obstacles in themselves, when combined with an outcome barrier this almost makes the decision to make a complaint null and void.

Concerns about filling in forms were particularly exacerbated in the case of groups with difficulties in reading and writing in English – especially migrants newly arrived in the UK, and Gypsies/Travellers. Participants within these groups often assumed that there was no alternative method of lodging a complaint other than by letter, and in English – prerequisites which they perceived as effectively preventing their right to complain³.

“As a Gypsy we’ve still got about 40% of our population that are illiterate, can’t read or write. And I’ve had it with them, when I’ve tried to make complaints on behalf of other people...say, put it in writing, and I say, well I’ll do it for him. ‘No, he’s got to put it in writing!’”

Male, Traveller, Mixed Age Group, Dorset

“If someone was prepared to interpret, [I] would be more willing to make a complaint.”

Female, Arabic, 16-24, Edgware

Another common process-related barrier was the fact that many participants did not know where to go to make a complaint, and did not know anything about the complaints procedure itself – including how long a case might take, what sort of evidence would be required to lodge a complaint, or what the potential or likely outcome of lodging a complaint might be.

“That’s the thing though, isn’t it, you don’t really know unless you go searching for it...you wouldn’t know off the top of your head who to go to if you want to complain against the police.”

Lesbian, Mixed Age Group, Manchester

“We don’t even know, I don’t even know, yes, there must be a complaints process and procedure, but I don’t know what is the first step first, how to go it, I haven’t actually seen lots of publicity about, if you’re going to complain.”

Male, Chinese, 40+, Greenwich

Process-related barriers often came into play because participants were unsure of the length of time involved in complaining, or the complexities associated with it. Therefore, making simple information available about what sort of experience it would be reasonable to expect when complaining (the length of time the process might take, what sort of time commitment might be required from the person complaining, etc) could help to allay these concerns.

Outcome barriers

The final set of barriers were outcome-related. Usually, participants were more likely to consider lodging a complaint if they were reasonably confident of a successful outcome. However, if they felt that their concerns were unlikely to be addressed by the police in a manner which they found acceptable, or unlikely to come to a successful conclusion, then they were less likely to consider making a complaint in the first place.

The most common outcome barrier, and one which was spread across most demographic groups, was the perception that making a complaint would make no difference, and that the police would basically ignore their concerns. It was notable that participants often mentioned this as a concern, even if they had no direct experience of complaining.

“We know nothing’s going to happen if we complain. We go into a police station and we start complaining, nothing’s going to happen.”

Male, Pakistani, 16-24, Slough

“Nothing would get done about it, so there would be no point to complain about it I’d say. Wouldn’t make much difference.”

Female, Indian, 16-24, Bristol

Linked to this perception was the feeling that the relative cost of lodging a complaint (in terms of the amount of time or hassle involved) would outweigh any potential benefits.

“Time and energy spent on doing it, and having to, the duress of going through the whole process, and speaking to other people about it. And then you just get to the point, well, actually I’m not really that arsed about it any more.”

Male, White, 16-24, Brighton

³ The Police Reform Act 2002 allows complaints to be made on someone else’s behalf with their written consent.

"I don't think anything would really put me off, but like I said before, it'd take a lot for me to actually get to the stage where I would even bother."

Lesbian, Mixed Age Group, Manchester

Many of the comments of younger participants echoed those of their older counterparts – that the process would be complex and drawn out, that the police would close ranks or in some other way act to discourage complaining, and that their complaints would not be taken seriously. However, these fears were often particularly accentuated by youth – and young people were frequently concerned that their complaints simply would not be taken seriously by the police.

"Maybe so convinced that they might not believe you as well, 'cos you're a kid they just think oh they're probably just lying ..."

Female, Indian, 16-24, Bristol

"No, not really, if you are older then you know bigger words to say...or if you go and make a complaint you don't want to sound like a little kid, you don't want to sound like no kid that's just trying to pick an argument over nothing."

Female, Black Caribbean, 16-24, Bristol

As with other barriers to complaining, outcome barriers were expressed by participants from all social and demographic groups. However, they were particularly likely to be expressed by those participants who had already gone through the mental process of deciding that their treatment warranted a legitimate complaint, but were not confident that the system would deliver a successful outcome. As such, many participants had already dropped out of the decision to complain at earlier decision stages – meaning that concerns about the outcome of complaining were often not considered.

Outcome barriers could be most easily reduced through making clear from the outset of any complaint a reasonable set of expectations about what people complaining can expect, and the range of possible outcomes associated with complaining.

In terms of the expectations of the overall outcome of lodging a complaint, it is notable that, whilst many participants had clear ideas and perceptions of the process of complaining – that it would make little difference, that the process would be time-consuming, that complaints (and particularly those from young people) would simply be ignored – many were less clear on what a positive outcome to a complaint would look like. When asked what they would like to see, most participants did not have a clear or specific picture of the type of potential penalties for misconduct which could be applied to specific officers, nor of the range of potential sanctions or compensation which could potentially be put in place.

This lack of a clear perception of what a successful outcome for a complaint would look like appeared to act

as a significant disincentive to working through the complaints process. Complaining was often perceived to be a bureaucratic, time-consuming prospect, whose range of outcomes was not clear.

Summary

This chapter has identified four separate sorts of barrier to making a complaint about the police:

1) Cultural constructs of acceptable police behaviour heavily impacted on the propensity to complain about specific types of behaviour. Typically 'Pro-police' participants also tended to express a willingness to make a complaint about a wide variety of things. Many 'Highly Disengaged' participants described how they had come to expect a low level of harassment or unprofessional behaviour from the police. This type of police behaviour could potentially form the basis of a legitimate complaint. However, the lack of faith in the police amongst this group would generally prevent them from making a complaint.

2) Some barriers related to fears about the police reaction to making a complaint. Typical examples included the fear that the police might label you a 'troublemaker', or that they would all stick together once a complaint had been made. These barriers also included fear of reprisals, especially amongst the 'Highly Disengaged' group, and the intimidation that some would feel when complaining about an authoritative group that exerts social control.

3) Process-related barriers to complaining were focussed around perceptions of bureaucracy or hassle involved in complaining. The fear that complaining would involve filling in a lot of forms, or that an acceptable outcome would take a long time were commonly mentioned. Whilst these process-related barriers were typically not expressed as forcefully by participants as other barriers, such as fear of reprisal, the bureaucracy of complaining was often expressed by participants whose English language skills were not good (such as recently arrived migrants), or whose literacy skills were poor (such as some Travellers and Gypsies).

4) Outcome-related barriers were related to the perceived likelihood among participants of a complaint being successful. For many, the decision to complain included weighing up the potential likelihood of any such complaint having a positive outcome, against the relative hassle of complaining. As such, the fact that many participants believed that lodging a complaint would make no difference (either to themselves personally, or to the police at large) acted as a powerful disincentive to complaining.

CHAPTER 5

Following on from the above discussion of the different barriers to making a complaint, the next chapter contains a discussion of the different ways in which participants suggested the police complaints system could be improved.

5

Respondents' views about improving the complaints system

As illustrated in the previous chapters, participants had a variety of experiences of and attitudes towards the police, which often impacted on their understanding or preconceptions of how the police complaints system might work. However, they had very little concrete knowledge of the police complaints system and little awareness of the IPCC. If the IPCC wishes to identify ways in which people could be encouraged to use the police complaints system (in appropriate circumstances), it is important to take on board the ways in which participants felt the system could be improved and how they believed an 'ideal' police complaints system would function.

This chapter summarises participants' perceptions of how an individual might go about complaining about a police officer or another member of police staff, before going on to discuss how they thought the system could be improved and how they believed an 'ideal' system should be run. Suggested improvements were often based on participants' presumptions about the police complaints system and experiences of other complaints systems, as few had actual experience of making a complaint or of dealing with the IPCC.

Awareness of the complaints process

Some felt the police (or the authorities charged with management of the police force) ought to actively publicise the steps the public could take if they wished to make a complaint against a police officer.

"I think what would be the most constructive thing from the police, I think every member of the British public should have a leaflet through their door, with a list of names and addresses of what to do in the event of wanting to make a complaint."

Female, general public, 25-34, East Anglia

"If you put adverts out, letting people know, [and] showing them that you understand the situation and you're there to help. I think...it might be a bit slow to start off with but people will take notice, as long as the message is strong...and visible enough to the public."

Female, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Tower Hamlets

As mentioned above, few people in any group had ideas about how they could go about making a complaint against a police officer or other police personnel/members of staff (or who they should approach). Participants generally felt there should be greater publicity about the ways the public could make a complaint – and what would be involved after the initial complaint was made. Suggestions for raising awareness included general advertising (flyers, radio/television adverts, billboard

adverts at bus stops and train stations) as well as more specifically targeted raising of awareness; for example, when someone has had dealings with police, participants felt they should be given documentation indicating who they could speak to if they were not happy with the way they had been treated, or a 'customer satisfaction'-style questionnaire.

"They need to inform us how we can do that. So that then we do have these complaints... whatever the reason is, but we need to know A, telephone number, B, the place to go, C, the time that it's open, and even if it's twice a week, like it says...it needs to be more publicly advertised."

Male, general public, 25-34, East Anglia

Whilst participants believed there should be greater awareness of ways in which people could complain about the police, some did voice concerns about encouraging too many people. These people were wary that the system could be overwhelmed with complaints and unable to prioritise the most important cases⁴, or that it could be open to abuse by those looking to retaliate against previous police action, or by those simply looking to cause some mischief.

"You don't want to make it too easy. You'll just get everyone as well."

Female, general public, 25-34, East Anglia

"...I feel that's what's really difficult about having a complaints system is that people who don't have a genuine complaint could abuse the system."

Lesbian, Mixed Age Group, Manchester

Participants stated that they would be more encouraged to make a complaint about the police if there was more information about how the complaint would be progressed, for example, if the person dealing with the complaint would get back to complainants quickly and keep them up-to-date with the progress of the investigation.

Complaint Access Points

Few participants were sure of where they could go if they wanted to make a complaint against a police officer/member of police staff. There was a general feeling that some kind of 'drop-in centre' might be helpful, but that it should be somewhere people could go to discuss a problem or issue more widely, rather than just somewhere

⁴ A small number of participants did not feel that there should be a prioritising of cases, but that they should be dealt with according to the order in which complaints were made. However, participants generally favoured some type of prioritising of complaints, e.g. prioritising investigation of those involving physical harm over those involving verbal abuse.

people would go to make a complaint. For example, it could offer potential complainants advice on what the complaints procedure would entail, and on likely outcomes.

People also suggested that using existing centres which are regarded as part of the community would appear more welcoming than approaching a police station or other office perceived as more “external” to the community. Some mentioned the possibility of tapping into community leaders or others visible within the community as a way to raise awareness, as they would appear more “approachable” and understanding of the situation than an external source, not from the community. This dovetails with an avenue we understand the IPCC is currently considering about encouraging the use of statutory, community and voluntary organisations as Complaint Access Points⁵, and inviting them to offer greater signposting as to how people can make complaints about the police, should these organisations become aware of such situations.

Some young people thought it would be helpful to recruit young people to act as external impartial observers in the community, in case they heard of, or saw, cases of inappropriate police behaviour. Others also mentioned the importance of recruiting officers from specific ethnic groups as a way to build trust in the police.

“In each community you get like a community centre and if you collect people there to do it. Then maybe hold a day where they can give out leaflets maybe and tell people how to deal with complaints or anything...”

Female, Indian, 16-24, Bristol

“You just have young people in the community, especially Asian and especially Black [people] in the community that act as, I don’t know, like youth marshals or something. So when they see someone getting stopped and searched they go over and check that the police are acting fairly, doing their job properly, check that the young person knows their rights.”

Male, Black Caribbean, 16-24, Brixton

Preferred methods of complaining

Participants in all groups tended to mention a variety of ‘preferred methods’ of contacting someone to make a complaint against the police. However, in general they conceded that whichever body or individual was entrusted with the role of assimilating and investigating complaints

⁵ At present, Complaint Access Points are not ‘designated third party reporting centres’ as defined under the Police Reform Act 2002. They cannot make complaints on behalf of someone else without written consent. Only MPs and solicitors can make a complaint on someone’s behalf without their written permission. Complaint Access Points can, however, make complaints on behalf of someone else with their written consent and/or provide a ‘signposting’ function.

against the police ought to be approachable through a range of methods. There was no consensus on a single method to contact an organisation – this depended more on individual preference.

“It should be by email, letter, telephone, or face-to-face. They should give you the option, ‘cos everyone has different lifestyles.”

Female, Mixed Race, 25-34, Moss Side

Some would turn to the internet as a standard resource for finding out more about a subject.

“I don’t know, I’d probably do the same as everybody else, look on the Internet and hope for the best.”

Lesbian, Mixed Age Group, Manchester

Others would feel more comfortable approaching the police to make a complaint via the telephone.

“I think they need to wake up, give us some sort of number or something where we can complain, and seriously take our complaints seriously and apply them to the police.”

Male, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Derby

“I’d rather do it over the ‘phone, and then they send me a copy of what’s been discussed through the post.”

Female, Mixed Race, 25-34, Moss Side

There were also ideas about how a contact system should not operate; for example, restricting access to office hours or an automatic voice answering ‘phone’ calls.

“Not so that you have to go. It’s rather like, if you could explain to them, it’s rather like when you phone BT, and it’s like, choose option one, do you want option two? Do you want option three? Do you want an option four? And if you choose the wrong one, then you start all over again. It’s kind of like that. We do not want that.”

Female, White, 16-24, East Anglia

“The thing is a 24-hour phone line...and they get home past six o’clock...and then you’ve got all night to go to ‘phone them, and you couldn’t do it through the day.”

Female, White, 25-34, Cardiff

However, others recognised that there were flaws to every contact method and that one method could not be the answer for everything.

“My concern about the telephone was, if you ‘phone somebody up and made a complaint, and they’re sitting on the other end of the ‘phone going, yeah, yeah, OK, you put the ‘phone down, and that’s it.”

Male, White, 25-34, Cardiff

Others favoured writing a letter of complaint as it would give time to consider how to word the approach as well as providing a hard copy to refer back to as proof of making the complaint. Some preferred writing a letter whereas

others felt an email or complaint made on a website would be as accessible, more instantaneous and easier/more inviting to use.

"I believe in written information. Written complaint. You just write your complaint with the name of the person and everything that happened with you. You just take that ...application with the authority or wherever you want to take it. And just mark that application and give that application to them and keep a photocopy of the page for your record. And if nothing [is] done with your application or your complaint you have the right to knock [on] the door of higher authorities. It happens in Pakistan."

Male, Pakistani, 16-24, Slough

Yet for some, the idea of writing down a complaint was off-putting as they felt they were better able to communicate verbally.

"Not everybody's good at putting things in writing. I know a lot of people that do like putting things in writing, and other people that don't. And with a 'phone, it's instant. With that, you've got to sit down, think about it...written it out, right, change this, change that, and it's time-consuming. And again, some people are quite busy."

Male, White, 25-34, Cardiff

Many believed that a 'drop-in' or personal approach might be more effective, although a few felt that "cooling off" time might be important, or feared that their complaint might be recorded incorrectly or tampered with if the proof of the complaint was left wholly in the hands of the police.

"Face-to-face, it's got to be face-to-face."

Male, Mixed Race, 24-34, Moss Side

None of the participants felt that texting was an appropriate method to complain as it did not allow sufficient space to detail a complaint and was not felt to be formal enough. It was also seen to be open to abuse both by teenagers and young people and possibly by the police who might be able to claim they had not received the text. There was some feeling that making a complaint against a member of police personnel needed to be fairly formal to reflect the serious nature of the situation, and how seriously the police and other investigators would treat it.

Preferred complaint-handling personnel

Participants expressed preferences for:

- Complaining to someone of a similar cultural background (although not all participants said they required this);
- Communicating with a senior police officer or member of police staff. Whilst many participants were not aware

of the details of police ranks, the feeling for many was that they would like to take the opportunity to make a complaint to somebody who could "make a difference" (though again, there was no consensus on this);

- Communicating with an independent individual such as a solicitor and
- Communicating with an independent body.

Some Asian participants felt that they might be more likely to make a complaint to another Asian official rather than a White one. This was partly due to linguistic reasons as well as cultural reasons, and the fact that they would expect greater understanding from another Asian person than from a White official.

"It's easier to speak to another Asian...just go in, you chat about it, they write it down 'cos a lot of people in our community can't even read or write. They've had a bad experience but they can't write a complaint, and it's quite difficult for them to do that."

Male, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Derby

"It'd have to be multi-cultural as well, so that different people that speak different languages. I'd try and network with community centres, like the Jagonari Centre, different centres in areas like this because this is where the people of the community come and this is where they will get information at. [A] Bengali who can't speak English can talk about this and then someone from the centre might say, hey, there's this organisation that does this, and this, you can contact them."

Female, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Tower Hamlets

Similarly, some of the Lesbian and Gay participants felt that it would be easier and less intimidating to speak to another Gay person as one might expect understanding and empathy from them.

"Again the thing about Brighton is I suppose that if one had to complain about homophobia, say since that is the problem we're dealing with hypothetically, there is an extremely nice Gay policeman which you know you could go and see. You know where he'll be, how to get hold of him and etc, etc, just as I suppose if you were a Black Englishman living in Bradford you would hope that you could go to a Black policeman and put your case that way."

Male, Gay, Mixed Age Group, Brighton

However, others from the Gay community (Lesbian participants in particular) were less likely to feel that sexual orientation was an issue – and it would not prevent them making a complaint about the police. As noted earlier, there was some indication that work had been done to build bridges between the police and the Gay communities in Brighton and Manchester (e.g. a police officer regularly attending the Gay support centre) which might have not only improved relationships with the police, but also helped alleviate concerns about police response to complaints.

Others said they would prefer to make a complaint to someone senior (based on their experiences with other organisations dealing with the public) as they believed senior members of staff were the ones who would be able to bring about changes and address any problems.

"It's like...any sort of businesses, or any McDonald's, anywhere you go, if you get angry or you complain you go, 'I want to speak to the manager', and they go 'oh my God', and then they eventually sort it out. The police ain't got that system where you say, who is your manager, they've got chief governors, but they don't actually sort it out, do they? If they actually had somebody who deals with these things, it would be a lot better."

Male, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Derby

A number of participants felt the first port of call for them would be a solicitor who would advise them whether to proceed with their complaint and what the best way forward would be. They believed that a solicitor would also support them if the issue did progress to an official complaint.

"Well, because a solicitor...a solicitor they're going to get paid to satisfy...whereas the police body, a body set up to look into the police might be getting paid to satisfy the police, do you know what I mean?"

Female, Mixed Race, 16-24, Birmingham

"I'd go to them with someone else present. Like a solicitor or something."

Female, Black Caribbean, 16-24, Bristol

As reflected above, when discussing the best place to which to make a complaint, participants felt that using community links as a mechanism would encourage members of the public to make a complaint. For example, some suggested using community centres as a focus point for making complaints – particularly as such centres have staff who can often help overcome language barriers.

An independent body

The majority of participants – regardless of background – were in favour of an independent body being responsible for dealing with complaints against the police. As discussed in the section on barriers, for some individuals this was linked to fears of overt intimidation from the police or their inability to be impartial when handling a case against a colleague.

"There should be an external source...If one copper's covering another copper's back, then some even senior copper can cover another copper's back. It's too internalised...It should be a total external body that has nothing to gain by investigating it."

Lesbian, Mixed Age Group, Manchester

"If there was a body that I could go to, independent of the police station, forget that, somebody, some office, some, a building you can go to like the Jobcentre and go in there and say, look I've got a complaint against this policeman, this, that, what can I do about it, yeah I probably would go in there and do it. But to actually, as you say, walk straight into a police station and say, I've got a complaint against one of your colleagues, I don't think so somehow 'cos you've got a camera up there in that little corner that's pointing at you."

Female, general public, 40+, Banbury

Others expressed a feeling of futility or resistance to complaining directly to such a powerful organisation about its own actions; a feeling that it was simply fairer for external agents to look into a complaint than to involve those who interact with individual officers or who may feel part of that organisation.

However, it was perceived as important that being independent did not compromise a body's power to investigate or take action to rectify (and if necessary discipline) officers and other staff. Some participants felt that it was important that people knew the organisation had the relevant authority to deal with a complaint.

"What I was thinking was, because earlier on I was thinking about this independent complaints system, is that we all talked about what we'd like them to be, like an independent body, and somebody who we could communicate [with] by telephone, or whatever. But I think as well that it would help for that body to make known the fact that they would have a degree of authority over the police."

Female, Mixed Race, 25-34, Moss Side

Many viewed the police as the last bastion of the law and found it difficult to comprehend how they could be held accountable, or how another organisation would have and would exercise power over the police. However, awareness and understanding of this organisation would also be a factor.

Citizens Advice Bureau

Other organisations people felt they might turn to were Citizens Advice Bureau⁶, which are viewed as independent to the police with legal knowledge and support systems. An important factor might also have been that, unlike solicitors, they are free to use.

"Citizens Advice Bureau-they're usually quite good. They've got their own system, which is outside of the police force. They've got nothing to do with the police."

⁶ The IPCC has agreements at a national level with the Citizens Advice Bureau, and is also working with regional organisations to provide signposting services.

They're very, very good. So if you're a, if you think about making a complaint, start there, and they'll tell you where to go from there."

Male, White, 16-24, Brighton

Most of the people who spoke of the Citizens Advice Bureau acting as a complaint point or advice point had used the service before, or had friends or family that had used it.

Using the media

Some believed that the only way to make a complaint against the police and to get action taken was to approach the media and publicise the case in order to shame the police into investigating and taking action. This was primarily for complaints deemed more serious, for example an assault, rather than the complaints more typically made by the 'Pro-police' group which were more likely to be examples such as incivility/rudeness. Feelings of support, rather than an individual against the police establishment, were also voiced as reasons to approach the media.

"If you want to complain to the policeman...make a difference really but if you complain to someone like the media...then it should get across to the people, and the people are on your side."

Male, Mixed Race, 16-24, Moss Side

"That's what I'd do, local press, 'cos then you've got more people behind you, it's not just one person against an establishment, you've got like some sort of name behind you to fight your cause or whatever but there again, you[ve] still got to prove it."

Male, White, 16-24, Banbury

These views are probably linked to the barriers discussed in the earlier section. By using the media, there is a perception that the barriers relating to fear regarding police reprisals, and outcome-related barriers, may be relieved.

A permanent record of complaint

Proof that a complaint had been made, and of the nature of the complaint, was seen to be important; hence the preference by some of making a written complaint. Others felt satisfied that a face-to-face or telephone conversation about the complaint would be noted down appropriately as a record that the conversation had taken place, presumably with indications of how this would be taken forward. Regular updates on how the investigation was progressing were also viewed as vital if people were to be encouraged that the system was working and was helpful to the public.

Raising the profile of the IPCC

Under the Police Reform Act 2002, the IPCC has the power to investigate complaints about police misconduct. It also has the power to investigate incidents, including death and serious injury following contact with the police.

This research found that there was a general lack of awareness of the powers and role of the IPCC. Many felt there was a link between the low profile of the IPCC and a lack of willingness to complain. However, others felt there needed to be greater awareness, not only of the IPCC as an organisation, but also of its achievements. For example, this could include greater publicity of actions it had been involved in, so that people were more aware generally that they were able to complain about police officers' behaviour as well as how and to whom they could complain. Some however were sceptical that it would ever be possible for members of the public to hold police officers to account.

Greater publicity of successful cases might also help to combat the feeling expressed by many that "nothing will change anyway."

"It's important to see some changes happening. Be it on the media or locally or whatever, things to happen. You can't just say overnight, 'oh we've sorted and we're dealing with it', unless you see results and you see a change, I don't think anything's going to happen."

Male, Bangladeshi, 16-24, Derby

Confidentiality

For some participants, concerns about confidentiality needed to be addressed. This included reassurances that information about the complaint would not be leaked to the wider community, and that the complaint would be kept confidential from the officer concerned. As the majority perception appeared to be that the only way to make a complaint was to go into a police station, many were put off by the fact that they might have to confront the police officer about whom they were complaining. Some were simply concerned that they might run into the individual at the station, or that the officer/staff member they complained to might discuss the case with the officer(s)/staff involved.

Stressing the confidentiality and the independence of the IPCC might help with this. However, people tended to remain concerned about this aspect when they discovered that complaints made directly to the IPCC are usually passed on to be dealt with by the police force concerned⁷.

⁷ Although this would not be to the individual officer who was complained about, it would generally go to the professional standards department for the force, or to an inspector at divisional level.

“From my point of view I think there should be a bit more confidentiality and there should be a special unit in the police station so you can go on a one-to-one basis and explain everything to them because if you complained against somebody in front of them, you never know, there might be something worse than they done in the past. You can feel victimised or something, so they should have a confidentiality [or a] unit somewhere in the police station that you can go with your own time or book an appointment and go and see them one-to-one.”

Female, Pakistani, 30+, Slough

Many mentioned that they would be more encouraged to complain in the event of inappropriate police behaviour, knowing that there is an independent organisation they could approach. However, when informed that complaints received via the IPCC are passed back to the individual police force to record and deal with, they were less encouraged as they did not see how this works any differently from complaining directly to the police force⁸. A minority of participants did not see much difference between an independent organisation such as the IPCC and the police as they both receive their funding from the Government, and so in their eyes the IPCC is not truly independent. Young men, and in particular some Black and Asian men, tended to hold this view.

Summary

Participants had many ideas about what could be done to improve the complaints system and how people could be encouraged to use the system. However, as many pointed out, one of the major stumbling blocks was the lack of awareness of how to go about complaining about the police (and in some cases even lack of awareness that members of the public were able to make complaints about police behaviour and actions). Thus, many of their suggestions were based on perceptions and assumptions rather than actual experience or knowledge of the system.

The general view was that the system of how to complain about the police should be as accessible and inclusive as possible, so there should be a variety of ways of getting in contact with the relevant organisation. People tended to feel it would be useful to use local links and community groups to help establish in the public's mind that they can make complaints about police behaviour and how to go about doing so.

Participants seemed to be overwhelmingly in favour of an independent organisation to which they could make complaints, and which would be responsible for the

handling of that complaint, rather than one which is part of or aligned to the police – with the proviso that it would still have some impact on the police and the way in which officers and staff behave. However, a small number of participants questioned whether a government-funded organisation could ever be that independent from the police.

CHAPTER 6

The following chapter contains our conclusions and recommendations for policy makers.

⁸ Complaints can be made directly to the IPCC, which then sends them to the force to record and deal with. However, if the complaint is of a serious nature the IPCC may decide to investigate the matter.

6

Conclusion and recommendations

The views presented in this report represent participants' perceptions of the police and the complaints process. Some are based on personal experience, and some on hearsay and the media. Both strongly impacted on participants' beliefs about the IPCC and the complaints process, and point towards a need for awareness-raising.

Particularly notable is the great variety of perceptions of the police and complaints process expressed by different subgroups. The research uncovered a great variety of perceptions, experiences and expectations – meaning that the conclusions and recommendations presented here are not necessarily 'one size fits all', but rather are varied, and aimed at engaging with the comments and criticisms made by the different subgroups.

In view of this we recommend that the research findings be taken forward in the following ways:

Perceptions of the police and perceptions of the complaints procedure

Throughout this research, participants of all social, economic and ethnic groups made clear the strong link between their overall perceptions of the police, and their perceptions of the police complaints system. Hence, those participants with a low opinion of the police in general – in particular, the 'Highly Disengaged' group – also tended overwhelmingly to be those with negative perceptions of the complaints process.

As such, if the IPCC is to successfully raise the levels of public confidence in the complaints system, this research suggests that a relatively high overall level of confidence in the police service as a whole is crucial. This was viewed as important, even by those participants who accepted the fact that the current procedure for lodging complaints is independent of the police themselves. This raises difficulties for the IPCC as some of the factors which may influence public confidence in the police are beyond its sphere of influence.

Whilst this high level of trust is important to all participants, it is crucial for developing a strategy to engage those currently least likely to trust the police – the 'Highly Disengaged' group – with the complaints process.

A definition of 'acceptable' behaviour

This research has highlighted how acceptable behaviour is currently culturally defined, and how this therefore leads

to some uncertainty as to what a legitimate complaint would be.

Those people who expect police officers to behave in a courteous manner towards them have their expectations challenged when an officer behaves in an abrupt or rude manner. These people would fit into our 'Pro-police' group. They are therefore more likely to classify the incident as justifying a complaint – and more likely to trust the 'system' (they were uncertain as to exactly who would investigate) to act on their complaint.

This research focussed on those subgroups who were less likely to make a complaint, or more sceptical about the police complaints process in general. While many did not think it right for an officer to behave in a rude or provocative manner, for many this entirely fitted in with their expectations of officers, and was therefore not deemed to be worthy of comment.

These 'Highly Disengaged' participants tended to often be those most likely to report their exposure to inappropriate behaviour by officers. Conversely, however, this group tended to be the least likely to lodge a complaint against an officer for misconduct – often because members of this group almost expected their contact with the police to be fractious or divisive. As such, for many 'Highly Disengaged' participants, the behaviour of the officers would have to be fairly serious to instigate a complaint.

Distribution of a document (perhaps derived from the Police Code of Conduct) informing members of the public of the offences they might justifiably complain about could be one way of potentially increasing the level of knowledge about what does and does not constitute acceptable behaviour. This would usefully be placed in public areas in the form of posters or leaflets where the public would have most access – e.g. police stations, libraries and local authority buildings such as housing offices. The Home Office has recently released a draft of the new Code of Professional Standards for police officers. This document is designed to set out clearly for both the public and the police the standards that are expected of the police. Once this is finalised it might be possible to use the new format to inform the public.

Clear guidelines on the complaining process

Participants were unclear as to exactly what the complaints process involves, but felt that it would be very time-consuming and bureaucratic. They would welcome clear guidance on what to expect from the process.

Process-related barriers often came into play because participants were unsure of the length of time involved in complaining, or the complexities associated with it.

Making simple information available about what sort of experience it would be reasonable to expect when complaining (for example, the length of time the process might take, and what sort of time commitment might be required from the person complaining) could help to allay these concerns.

Related to this is a need for increased clarity of outcome. A well-defined process for complaining should outline what a complainant could expect. This might be a local resolution of the complaint, the subject of the complaint receiving 'words of advice' from a senior officer, or a more serious form of discipline.

Again, this could be made available in summary form as part of the posters and leaflets regarding officer conduct. Clear access points for further information would be essential; for example, a Freephone number and website link.

Reassurance for the complainant

Protecting the identity of the complainant was felt to be essential. A lack of trust in the police, particularly prevalent among disengaged members of the public, translated into a belief that the police would find a way to "get back" at the complainant.

Participants stated that they would prefer that reassurances that information about the complaint would not be leaked to the wider community, and that the complaint would be kept confidential from the officer concerned. As the majority perception appeared to be that the only way to make a complaint was to go into a police station, many were put off by the fact that they might have to confront the offending member of the police. Some were simply concerned that they might run into the individual at the station, or that the officer/staff member they complained to might discuss the case with the officer(s)/staff involved.

However, the complaints process means that this is not easily achievable. Some complaints, by their nature, would require details to be divulged in order for investigation to take place, which could then easily identify the complainant to the individual concerned. However, it is clear that some form of reassurance is required about what protection could be afforded to complainants, such as explaining to them that there are professional standards departments in each force which may investigate complaints and divisional inspectors who may help locally resolve complaints.

Clarity of potential outcomes

For many participants, the range of potential outcomes to any complaint registered would act as a deterrent to

initially embarking on the complaints process in the first place.

The most common outcome barrier, and one which was spread across most demographic groups, was the perception that making a complaint would make no difference, and that the police would basically ignore the complainant's concerns. It was notable that participants often mentioned this as a concern, even if they had no direct experience of complaining.

Clearly, before any complaint has run its course, it is not possible to provide details of all the potential sanctions on offer. However, many participants had no idea at all of the range of outcomes from lodging a complaint. If the potential outcomes (even very broadly) were outlined to prospective complainants, they could act as an incentive, encouraging participants to work through the process of complaining with a clearer idea of what the outcome could be.

Recommendations

In summary, recommendations emerging from the research are as follows:

- First and foremost, a strategy is required to engage members of the public with the police and their work. This is clearly a broader goal, but will bring with it an increased sense of engagement with the complaints process.
- Clear guidance on standards that are expected from the police – it is possible that the draft Code of Professional Standards could be adapted for this use.
- Readily available guidelines on how to complain, and what to expect from the complaints process to complement information already provided in police stations.
- Reassurance regarding what protection and anonymity for the complainant is possible within the complaints process.
- Clarity of potential complaint outcomes – informing people of the range of consequences: a local resolution of the complaint, the subject of the complaint receiving 'words of advice' from a senior officer, or a more serious form of discipline.

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Appendix A: Topic Guide

Core Aims and Objectives

The overarching aims of the topic guide are to particularly focus upon:

- Perceptions of the police complaints system
- Barriers to making a complaint, or reasons why participants are resistant to making a complaint
- What sort of things can be done to make the complaints system more effective
- Any future improvements to the complaints system
- Finally, level of awareness of the IPCC

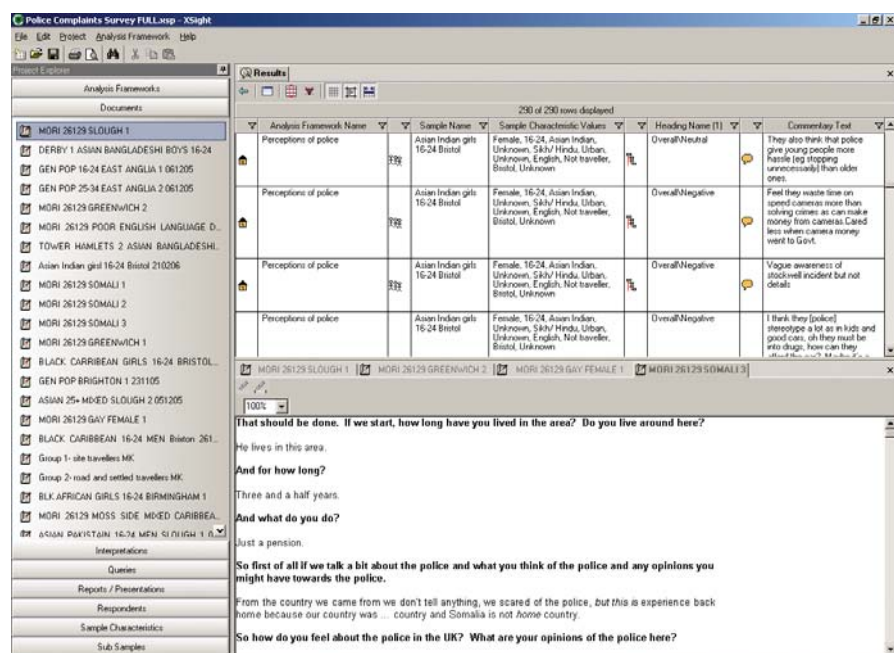
Discussion Areas	Notes	Approx Timing
1. Introduction and Background		10 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank respondents for coming • Introduce self, MORI. Will tell people who the client is as the group progresses • Role of MORI – researcher, gather all opinions • Explain overall purpose of research – to explore perceptions and opinions of police complaints system • Housekeeping – toilets, fire exit, refreshments, mobile phones • Get permission to record • Introductions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First name • Where do you live? Who with (household details)? • How long have you lived there? • What do you do (employment status)? 	<p>Orientates people, gets them prepared to take part in the discussion</p> <p>Outlines the ‘rules’ of the discussion (including those we are required to tell them about under Market Research Society and Data Protection Act guidelines)</p> <p>Gives people a chance to start interacting and provides contextual background information about each respondent (which can then be used in the analysis)</p>	

2. Perceptions of the police	Notes	10 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USE FLIPCHART: What words come into your mind when I say the word ‘police’? Overall, what are your opinions towards the police in general? Why? PROBE: Overall level of satisfaction with the way the police do their job? PROBE: What contact have you had with the police? • What is your level of confidence in the police to do their job? How confident are you in the police force’s ability to do their job? Why do you say that? PROMPT: High/medium/low confidence – Why? • Do you think that your local force is better or worse than average? Why? Why not? • Do the police ever make mistakes? Why? Why not? 	<p>Though perceptions of the police are not the main aim of the group, this section gives participants a chance to ‘offload’ feelings about the police. Please try to keep this part of the discussion to 10 minutes</p>	
3. Nature of complaints and experience of complaints procedure		20 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of police behaviour would you complain about? • PROBE HOW SERIOUS COMPLAINT HAS TO BE BEFORE PEOPLE THINK ABOUT COMPLAINING: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Police being rude/uncivil ◦ Time taken to respond to calls ◦ Stopped and searched ◦ Assaulted? • Who, if anyone, would you contact first if you had a complaint about the police? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How? Verbally? In writing? Who else might you contact? • Have you ever made a complaint/wanted to make a complaint against the police? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ THOSE WHO HAVE MADE A COMPLAINT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who did you complain to? - Were you happy with the way that your complaint was handled? - Would you complain in the future, in similar circumstances? ◦ THOSE WHO WANTED TO BUT DID NOT MAKE A COMPLAINT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What were your experiences? - Why didn’t you take the matter any further? - Would you complain in the future, in similar circumstances? ◦ THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HAD CAUSE TO COMPLAIN: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you think you would have a right to complain about? - And/or what would you want to complain about (as this might differ)? - If you had a complaint would you feel happy/ comfortable in making that complaint? Why? - What, if any, help do you feel would help you to make a complaint? 	<p>To introduce the idea of a complaints system</p> <p>Aim to identify how serious the complaint will have to be before people think about complaining.</p> <p>Do respondents expect a certain type of behaviour from the police?</p> <p>To assess the level of general knowledge about the complaints system</p> <p>To uncover top-of-mind assumptions about the complaints system, and to begin to uncover barriers to complaining</p>	

<p>COMPLAIN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you think you would have a right to complain about? - And/or what would you want to complain about (as this might differ)? - If you had a complaint would you feel happy/ comfortable in making that complaint? Why? - What, if any, help do you feel would help you to make a complaint? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PERCEPTIONS: Can you describe to me what you imagine it would be like to complain to the police? PROBE: difficult/easy? Lots of forms to fill in? Taken seriously or not? • Would you be confident that your complaint would be handled effectively? Why do you say that? Who might handle it, do you think? • How do you think that making a complaint to the police differs from making a complaint against other organisations (local council/doctor or hospital/bank etc)? Easier or more difficult? Why? Why not? 		
<p>4. Reasons for not complaining</p>		<p>20 mins</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you think of the advantages and disadvantages of complaining to the police? ◦ UNPROMPTED: BRAINSTORM ON CARDS/ WRITE ON FLIPCHART ◦ PROMPT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to get a problem rectified? - for compensation? - to get apology? - to get officer disciplined? - other reasons? • Would you contact anyone if you had a complaint about the police? Why/why not? PROBE: Who? MP? Citizens Advice Bureau? Local Council? Other? • ON FLIPCHART: Can you tell me anything that would put you off making a complaint to the police? • REFER BACK TO PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE: Is there a relationship between what you think of the police and whether or not you might complain about them? What? • ON FLIPCHART: Group together overt reasons for complaining – try to identify any overarching reasons for not complaining. 	<p>To gather initial perceptions of complaining in general, and to potentially begin to uncover barriers to complaining</p> <p>Flipchart is used in order to try and develop some sort of coherent structure to barriers to complaining</p>	
<p>5. Developing a new complaints procedure</p>		<p>15 mins</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We're now going to do a brief exercise. How would you encourage people to complain about the police? • <u>WHO</u> do you think people would rather complain to? PROBE: Police organisation? Independent body? • <u>HOW</u> would people generally prefer to complain? 	<p>Aim is to try and develop an 'ideal type' of complaints system – to potentially compare to the present system</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>WHAT</u> sort of feedback would you like during the complaints procedure? How frequently would you like feedback? • <u>WHAT</u> sort of things need to be put in place in order to encourage people to complain appropriately? PROBE: Clear information on how to complain? Belief that the complaint will be taken seriously? Able to complain direct to non-police organisations? Any others? • <u>HOW</u> could we improve the complaints procedure in future? 		
<p>6. Attitudes to the IPCC</p>		<p>10 mins</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you heard of the IPCC? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ IF YES: Where did you hear about the IPCC? ◦ IF NO: Have you heard of the PCA? • What does the name mean to you? What kind of an organisation do you think it is? • Do you know what its relationship to the police is? • Where might you go to get in touch with it/find information about it? • What sort of complaints does it deal with? All? Minor? Major? Why/Why not? 	<p>To uncover any further knowledge of the IPCC not already covered in the guide</p> <p>PCA: mentioned in order to check if participants know of a complaints body, but who may not have heard of the IPCC</p>	
<p>7. Conclusion and wrapping up</p>		<p>5 mins</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any further comments about making a complaint to the police? • Any final message to relay back to the IPCC on complaints? 		

Appendix B: Using Xsight to analyse and interpret qualitative research



In order to analyse and interpret thoroughly the information collected thoroughly, we used QSR Xsight software. This is relatively new to the field of commercial qualitative software and provides a means of constructing a structured and searchable framework within which to categorise data. Xsight is also designed to work as a knowledge management tool to formally capture and organise data from different moderators, meaning that it is ideally placed to assist researchers in their analysis of large-scale qualitative projects. An example page is shown above.

Each moderator had their own version of the software in which they could write up their findings from each of their groups or depth interviews, including their own interpretations and verbatim comments made by participants. This was reviewed by the core team at stages throughout the fieldwork to ensure consistency of approach by all moderators. Each moderator's own version, once complete, was merged into a master copy containing findings from every element of the study.

Once all the data had been entered into Xsight, the research team then began to identify underlying patterns and themes within the data, e.g. looking at the characteristics of participants who felt that a particular issue was most salient in their area and useful to explore further.

Interpreting qualitative research

Qualitative research involves an interactive process between the people carrying out the research and those being researched. It provides a way of probing the underlying attitudes of participants, and obtaining an understanding of the issues of importance. The real value of qualitative research is that it allows insights into the attitudes, and the reasons for these attitudes, which could not be probed in as much depth with a structured questionnaire.

However, it must be remembered when interpreting these findings that they are not based on quantitative statistical evidence. The findings are drawn from a small sample of those living in the area and are therefore illustrative rather than statistically representative. In this report, we record perceptions, not facts; participants may hold views that are based on incorrect information. These perceptions are reported here.

Throughout the report, use is made of verbatim comments from participants. These have been selected to exemplify a particular view of a body of participants, although it is important to remember that the views expressed do not always represent the views of all the participants as a whole.

Appendix C: Recruitment Matrix

DISCUSSION GROUPS		MINI GROUPS (CA. 5 RESPONDENTS)						
	General population (local ethnic make-up)	Black Caribbean	Black African	Mixed Race (Black Caribbean/African)	Asian Pakistani	Asian Bangladeshi	Asian Indian	Chinese
	ABC1	C2DE						
Male 16-24 Location	Banbury (suburban, contact with police)	Brixton, London (urban)	Hackney, London (urban)	Moss Side, Manchester (urban)	Slough (Muslim, suburban)	Derby (suburban)	Derby (suburban)	Greenwich, London (urban)
Female 16-24 Location	East Anglia (rural)	Bristol (urban)	Birmingham (urban)	Birmingham (urban)	Tower Hamlets, London (Muslim, urban)	Tower Hamlets, London (urban)	Bristol (urban)	Greenwich, London (urban)
Mixed gender 25-34 Location	North Cardiff (rural)	Bristol (urban)		Moss Side, Manchester (urban)		Bristol (Muslim only, urban)		
Mixed gender 40+ Location	Newcastle (urban, contact with police)		Hackney, London (urban)		Slough (Men, suburban)	Birmingham (English 2nd language, Bengali, Women, urban)	Birmingham (Women only)	Greenwich, London (urban)
	Banbury (suburban, contact with police)							

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